

Draft COMMUNITY CHOICES 2020/21 UPDATE REPORT

Summary

1. Since 2017, the work of local government in meeting the 1% target has evolved from piloting small grants Participatory Budgeting (PB) activity, towards mainstream PB as a way of delivering local services in partnership with communities.
2. Whilst the COVID pandemic has resulted in delays in meeting the 1% target, notable progress had been made in engaging senior management and political members with this agenda and securing their buy in for future work. This is a definitive step forward in the mainstream PB journey as councils look to allocate resources in a way which goes beyond distributing 'pots' of money, towards a way of working which fully transforms how communities participate in the design and delivery of local services.
3. COSLA have worked with local officers to engage a range of service and policy areas with the mainstream PB agenda. This work is happening at a time of reducing resources, rapidly shifting priorities in response to the pandemic and increasing asks upon local government. The ambition of local government is that PB can provide a way to reform services in response to the Christie Commission, empower local communities and strengthen local democracy.
4. Reviewing the work of all 32 councils towards the 1% Commitment the following progress can be noted.
 - 18 councils are actively engaged in mainstream PB planning across the corporate directorate and/or integrating PB approaches across a range of service areas.
 - 2 council reported on small grants PB
 - 7 councils reported on processes aligned to consultation and engagement activity for budget decisions.
 - 1 council were noted as still in the design phase for PB
 - 4 councils reported no progress
5. This progress to date indicates that there is still a key role to be played by the PB team within COSLA over the coming year. Priorities for the team in supporting progress towards the 1% target include:
 - Supporting councils where mainstream activity is underway to access the CONSUL platform and learn from innovation in PB across Scotland.
 - Developing political consensus locally on the mainstream PB agenda. This will involve working with local officers to bring together elected

members, locally and nationally to discuss opportunities and challenges in relation to Mainstream PB.

- Working with councils to reframe the PB agenda within the context of recovery and renewal from the pandemic.
6. Alongside local government progress towards the 1%, key policy drivers of service reform, community empowerment and democratic renewal have also developed in recent years. These changes provide important context for the future delivery on the 1% target by local government and how PB can be integrated across the broader public sector.

Policy Context:

COVID-19

7. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Scottish Local Government have been required to prioritise public health, support vulnerable households, and ensuring community safety and wellbeing. Reflecting upon the work of Local Government throughout the pandemic, the COSLA [Blueprint for Local Government](#) outlines six priority areas for recovery:
1. Strengthening Local Democracy
 2. Funding Services and Communities
 3. Wellbeing – including Health and Social Care
 4. Education and Children and Young People
 5. Economy and the Environment
 6. Supporting Vulnerable Communities
8. In outlining the future vision for local government across Scotland the Blueprint calls for a vibrant and equal local democracy where people are empowered to actively participate in local decisions. Local Government set forward a commitment to enable and empower local people to take part in decisions on local services.
9. Within this context, PB, place-based approaches, and community wealth building are strong examples of local government's commitment to ensuring that decisions are made by, not for, communities. Across Health and Social Care, Education, Environment and the Economy, and in supporting vulnerable communities most acutely affected by the impacts the pandemic, local government have a clear mandate to embed the experiences and views of citizens within service reform.
10. This future vision for local government in Scotland provides a strong basis for building upon the existing Community Choices Framework Agreement and extending the use of participatory and deliberative processes to engage and empower communities, citizens, and service users.

If not now, when? Social Renewal Advisory Board [Report](#)

11. Convened in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Advisory Board Report sets forward 20 Calls for Action in relation to recovery from the pandemic. Chapter 4 sets out four specific calls for action in relation to Community and Collective Endeavour, call to action 16 calls for;

“a further shift in the balance of power, enabling individuals and communities to have more control over shaping local and national policy, more help to realise the greatest benefit from local assets, and more say in taking funding and grant-making decisions – all in a way that maximises place-based approaches and advances equality.”

12. COSLA welcomed the publication of the report, outlining in [response](#) that many of the key areas of work identified through the report are actively being progressed by local government. In response to Action 16, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015), Local Governance Review and Community Choices Framework Agreement were viewed as significant progress in shifting power and decision making closer to communities. However, in meeting action 16, ensuring equitability to access opportunities for empowerment and participation remains an ongoing priority to ensure that this work is embedded within a human rights approach.

National Participatory Budgeting Strategic Group

13. The National Participatory Budgeting Strategic Group brings together representatives from Scottish Government, Local Government, COSLA, Police Scotland, community representatives and third sector partners with the remit of developing a national vision for PB in Scotland. The group are committed to engaging the broader public sector with PB. In August 2021, the group published the [Future of Participatory Budgeting Framework for Scotland](#) which sets forward a vision as to how PB will be integrated across public services to transform democracy and local decision making. The group will continue to develop the framework in partnership with local government, public sector, voluntary sector, and community partners.

Scotland’s Citizen Assembly

14. Engagement and empowerment of citizens through deliberative processes was highlighted as a priority by the [Citizen’s Assembly](#) of Scotland. Recommendations from the report include introducing governance and oversight arrangements led by citizens and communities across all levels of government and the public sector to overcome barriers of citizens engagement in decision making.
15. The success of, and support for, enhanced deliberative decision making on national and local decisions provides a valuable opportunity to promote

participatory budgeting as one tool through which communities can engage on local issues and priorities.

16. The recommendations from the report also mirror requests from COSLA members to expand current practice on PB to include other deliberative processes e.g. mini-publics, community conversations and priority planning around service redesign. There is a strong interest from local government in exploring how other participation and deliberation methods can be integrated into the mainstreaming agenda.

European Charter of Local Self Government

17. The incorporation of Local Government as the democratic representatives of local communities into Scots Law strengthens the voices of local communities and the needs of local people. The Charter formalises and embeds partnership working between both spheres of government and will ensure that subsidiarity of decision making is the default policy position across Scotland.
18. Of relevance to embedding a culture of participation and empowerment across local government, the Charter incorporates the right of Citizens to participate in public life, ensuring that any person who wishes to participate in the activity of a local authority, can do so. The rights of citizens to participate in local decision making is already law via the Community Empowerment Act, via parts 3 (Participation Requests) and parts 10 (Participation in Public Decisions – yet to be introduced).

Equalities and Human Rights

19. COSLA are currently working closely with Directors of Finance to develop a local government position on Human Rights Budgeting. The publication of the [report](#) from the National Taskforce for Human Rights Leadership sets forward key recommendations for the development of a new statutory human rights framework to protect human rights to the maximum extent possible.
20. These recommendations include the development of a statutory framework for participation with diverse communities and those with lived experience. Of specific interest to the work of local government around participatory budgeting:
 - Recommendation 15 proposes a duty on Scottish Ministers to publish a human rights scheme which reports specifically on how a duty to take human rights into account during the budgetary process was met. Included in the recommendation is the proposal that such a duty would include how affected communities are involved in strategic decision making on budgetary decisions.
 - Recommendation 29 requests consideration of the explicit right to participation within the development and implementation of the framework

to ensure that public bodies strive to continuously improve participation and engagement practices.

21. Further development of work with local government on Human Rights Budgeting provides a valuable opportunity for Mainstream participatory budgeting to be embedded within an equalities and human rights based approach to resource allocation.

Climate Change and a Just Transition

22. [Scotland's Climate Assembly \(Interim Report\)](#) and subsequent publication of the [Just Transition Commission Report](#) set forward a vision for a fair and equitable transition towards a net-zero economy for Scotland.

23. Answering the question, 'How should Scotland change to tackle the climate emergency in an effective and fair way?' the Climate Assembly set forward a range of goals centred on principles of community empowerment, participation and engagement. The realisation of these goals will be focused upon a place-based and person-centred approach whereby solutions are developed in partnership between communities and local government. PB and deliberative democracy are already being used across Scotland to help communities identify priorities and local government plan services. Early adoption of community wealth building, the success of community asset transfers and the use of mini publics to inform and engage citizens and communities are already practised by Scottish local authorities. These processes all enhance community participation in local decision making and ensure decisions are taken as close to the people affected as possible.

24. The role of community participation and deliberation to tackle the climate emergency is also recognised in the Just Transition Commission Report which recommends establishing Green Participatory Budgeting to empower and invigorate local communities to make decisions based on local needs and priorities.

Local Authority progress towards the 1%

25. As part of the joint COSLA and Scottish Government Community Choices Framework Agreement councils were asked to report on 2020/21 progress towards meeting the 1% target. Twenty-nine councils had returned their pro-forma return at the time of this report.

Budgets

26. Throughout 2020/21 Scottish councils reported allocating £78,302,012 through PB activity. Of this, £28,211,470 was allocated to capital projects and £50,090,542 for revenue programmes. The national 1% target for council budgets in 2020/21 was £108,377,760.

27. Councils were asked to provide figures for the number of participants involved in PB during the period, pro-forma evidence indicates that at least 43,828 people engaged in PB activity hosted by Scottish councils in 2020/21. It is anticipated that the actual number of participants is higher than that reported as several councils were unable to provide this information but had hosted PB activity.

28. It was also noted that some PB projects scheduled to happen throughout 2020/21 had to be postponed due to the pandemic, totalling at least £4,405,000. The impacts of the pandemic will likely continue to be an issue into to 2021/22 reporting year.

Mainstream Activity

29. During 2020/21 the type and scale of PB activity carried out by councils is summarised below

- 18 councils engaged in mainstream PB projects involving one or more service area across the council. Mainstream PB activity for some councils also incorporated elements of small grants PB and deliberative activity e.g. citizens panels.
- 2 councils reported on small grants PB only
- 7 councils reported on processes more closely aligned to existing consultation and engagement practices than PB activity.
- 1 council noted that they were still in the design phase for their mainstream strategy
- 4 councils reported no progress.

30. Based on the pro-forma responses and a separate survey of councils carried out in early 2020, PB activity carried out with specific communities of interest or place included engagement with:

- Carers
- Care experienced children and young people
- Young people

- BAME population
- Service users
- School Pupils
- Community organisations
- Tenants

31. PB work with partner agencies and the broader public sector was also evident with partnership approaches to PB alongside;

- Local carer agencies
- Area Partnerships
- Schools and Education
- Community councils
- Alcohol and Drugs Partnership
- Health and Social Care Partnerships
- Disabled People Organisations
- Third Sector
- Housing Cooperatives
- Restorative Justice
- Police Scotland
- Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
- Third Sector
- Health and Social Care Partnerships

32. PB activity carried out in 2020/21 also addressed a range of thematic/ service areas indicating that mainstreaming PB across councils was progressing well. Service/thematic areas where PB had been carried out included:

- Council Budget Setting
- Passenger Transport
- Capital Developments
- Community Planning
- Roads and Infrastructure
- Grounds Maintenance and Landscaping
- Young People
- Alcohol and Drugs
- Housing and Tenant Services
- Environmental Services/Parks and Greenspaces
- Education
- Children's Services
- Digital Isolation
- Social Isolation
- Food Poverty
- Child Poverty
- Culture and heritage
- Libraries and Community Facilities
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Employability

33. Six councils indicated that they had used or were developing deliberative processes as part of PB approach. Deliberation was seen to be an integral design step of mainstream PB, with deliberative processes happening across communities and with elected members. A range of approaches to deliberation were taken including co-production, citizens juries, budget delegates, steering groups, partnerships with Community Councils and the use of online deliberation tools.

Outcomes of Mainstream PB

34. As part of general feedback from officers on the impacts of PB across council services and communities to date, officers noted a range of benefits which support statutory duties on community empowerment, inclusion, and opportunities for communities to participate.

35. Generally, PB was viewed as a method to increase engagement in local decisions, a way to increase awareness and understanding of local need, and as a way to increase understanding of the factors which must be accounted for as part of local planning and service delivery e.g. equalities issues. PB was seen to provide greater opportunities in local decision making for communities and enable councils and communities develop local solutions to local issues. PB was also viewed as a way for communities to better understand what local council services do and as an opportunity for local people to increase their awareness of local issues which impact their lives.

“Projects are able to secure funding to deliver services or attract better resources for their users Projects share the business of their group with the wider community, building better understanding of whats going on in a community and opportunities for people to engage in. Groups develop skills in applying for funding, promoting projects, public speaking (capacity building) Local people are in charge of where money is allocated and able to prioritise budgets (empowering experience) Local people are introduced to voting and for some this is the first time they have ever voted.”

“Communities have seen these projects delivering the improvements they suggested. There were further positive outcomes for the communities around the ongoing engagement to implement the successful ideas and this gave opportunities for them to work alongside council officers from different services to develop the project through to implementation.”

“Increased engagement of our communities in decision making. Increased satisfaction in services, which are more aligned to communities wishes. Increased voice of young people in decision making - 6000 plus young people voting at Youth PB events (digitally) Increased involvement of 'other depts.' in engaging with communities positively.”

Emerging priorities 2021/22

36. Pro-forma data demonstrate that strong progress towards meeting the 1% has been made by councils in 2020/21. This progress is particularly significant considering that some councils postponed planned PB activity to prioritise pandemic response.
37. Whilst recognising the impacts of the pandemic upon council progress, the revised (2021) Community Choices Framework Agreement sets forward an ambitious vision for mainstreaming PB across council services in future years. Central to progressing with this vision will be working with councils to support and refine PB activity to ensure good quality participatory processes continue to be developed. The pro-forma returns indicate that in some instances consultation and engagement work is viewed as meeting the criteria for PB activity. Whilst local discretion on PB design methodologies remains important, there is evidence of a need to enhance, rather than retrofit, existing consultation and engagement activity to ensure it aligns with PB principles.
38. Council progress towards meeting the 1% target in 2020/21 has also highlighted strong examples of good practice and innovation in community participation, service design and democratic reform. Learning from councils during this period will be developed further by COSLA officers into Mainstream PB Guidance for 2022.
39. COSLA Leaders and Officers via the National PB Officers Network have agreed to develop additional indicators to measure the wider benefits of PB within the broader empowerment context. As part of this process a review of existing indicators in the National Performance Framework and the three T's of PB, Transactional, Transference and Transformation (O'Hagan et al. 2017) will be explored.