



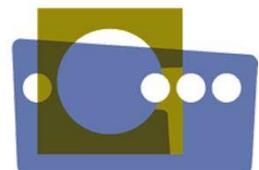
Final Evaluation Impact Report for the PB Works project in Northern Ireland

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Community Places



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1 Executive Summary

- Participatory Budgeting is a deliberative democratic process in which local people decide how to allocate all or part of a public budget. The concept is relatively new in Northern Ireland not least because of the sensitivities around a tradition of weak local government but also the strength of executive control over public policy.
- The Participatory Budgeting Works Project (PB Works) in Northern Ireland is a collaborative effort to raise awareness and advocate for the use of PB processes across the region. It was funded by the Big Lottery Fund and delivered through Northern Ireland's Building Change Trust as part of their 'Creative Space for Civic Thinking' programme.
- PB Works is co-ordinated by Community Places with a total project budget of £50,000 with the first phase running from December 2017 to November 2018. During this period PB Works hosted a total of 4 awareness raising events, delivered 4 training Workshops and put together a local PB advisory group. It also launched a dedicated PB Works website that helped to share PB support materials; local best practice as well as encourage others to subscribe to Northern Ireland's own internal PB network. In partnership with PB partners and the Democratic Society, the project also provided tailored support and guidance for 7 local PB projects hosted by 3 local government authorities and 4 community based organisations.
- Whilst the scheme involved a comparatively modest investment over a short time period, it did have an important demonstrator effect on the budgets of participating statutory agencies and voluntary sector organisations. Every £1.00 invested in PB Works, leveraged an additional allocation of 43p into the pooled budgets. The capacity to integrate funding under a PB umbrella demonstrates the potential to scale up these schemes, especially at local government level and among key Non Departmental Public Bodies
- As well as raising awareness about PB and its relevance to the local Northern Irish context, PB Works has clearly helped to build the capacity, confidence and competencies of both individuals and communities looking to implement PB processes across the region. By supporting the delivery of 4 high impact events in Rathlin; Lisnaskea; and in Newry, Mourne and Down, Kilkeel and Newry, it has also helped to allocate money and resources to groups or projects that had previously encountered difficulties accessing mainstream funding. In light of recent concerns published by the NI Audit Office around how public money and resources are distributed, this evaluation shows that PB offers a practical way of engaging more meaningfully with localities and allocating resources in a more open, transparent and democratic way.
- Despite the successes created by local PB events, practice across Northern Ireland is limited by weak legislation and a lack of political commitment in central and local government. The pilot PB projects hosted in two local councils

demonstrate the experimental status of PB and it is too early to fully evaluate the long term outcomes, especially on service users themselves but also how it can be integrated effectively into existing institutional structures and processes. The scope of PB and its capacity to tackle more complex issues such as community relations is also relatively untested, especially in the most deprived and divided areas of Northern Ireland.

- Moving forward, it will be important to develop the enabling environment and continue to provide resources and tailored support for those looking to create new PB schemes. This might include continuing to invest time and resources into the development of the PB website as a learning portal for toolkit support, process templates and best practice models. The opportunity to capitalise on the network being created as a result of the project is also important. It is recognised that this will also require additional resources and a short term action could be a search strategy including central and local government as well as independent donors, to attract mainstream funding for the next phase of PB in Northern Ireland.
- Operational guidance on how to overcome specific challenges, especially linked to procurement will also be critical to scaling and embedding PB practice in the long term. This may involve heightened engagement with local government finance departments, the NI Audit Office and the relevant accounting guidance.
- As well as working to embed PB into existing structures it will also be important to explore how PB could be applied effectively to other relevant policy or programme areas such as strengthening participatory practice within community planning and in housing, especially around community relations and shared space initiatives. There is also the potential to extend the scope of PB within the context of current or emerging active citizen engagement programmes but also more experimental policy areas such as developer contributions.
- A robust monitoring framework could also be developed to provide standard measurable outputs linked to economic, social, cultural or environmental activity and could include indicators that also better understand the impact of PB processes on personal development, skills, confidence levels as well as individual empowerment.

2 Introduction

2.1 What is Participatory budgeting?

Participatory Budgeting is a deliberative democratic process in which local people decide how to allocate all or part of a public budget. Developed in the radical economics of post-Dictatorship Brazil, it has since extended to other countries, institutions and decision-making arenas. Ganuza and Francés (2015) reviewed systems in Brazil, Spain, France and Germany and highlighted the distinction between the deliberative content of these schemes as opposed to the passive participatory stance that characterises many formal government consultation approaches. To better understand some of these different approaches, examples of PB practice that have taken place prior to the implementation of the PB Works project will be presented and reviewed in Section 2 of this report.

Participatory Budgeting is comparatively new in Northern Ireland, not least because of the sensitivities of a tradition of weak local government and the strength of executive control over public policy. The opening out of decision making and the commitment to public engagement provides an important context, not just to review the empirical focus of this evaluation—the PB Works project, but also to capture and extend the learning from its implementation.

This evaluation of the PB Works projects will thus focus on both the delivery experiences of the participants as well as what can be done towards creating a more effective enabling environment in the short and long term. To date, experience in scaling and replicating innovative participatory approaches in Northern Ireland has been patchy, especially around participatory decision making and transferring control to the public and away from a (fairly newly) elected local and central government. It will therefore be important for the evaluation to identify the potential barriers to rolling out Participatory Budgeting as well as the social, political, skills and financial implications of strengthening it across the broader Northern Ireland policy system.

2.2 The PB Works project

The Participatory Budgeting Works Project (PB Works) in Northern Ireland is a collaborative effort to raise awareness and advocate for the use Participatory Budgeting (PB) processes across the region. Through a series of dedicated road shows and training Workshops as well as access to external mentoring from PB partners and the Democratic Society, PB Works provided expert training and tailored support for those interested in developing and implementing PB processes within an organisation or statutory agency and department.

The project has been co-ordinated by Community Places and from December 2017—November 2018 has collaborated with a range of organisations from the public, community and voluntary sector that have worked together to create an enabling and more supportive environment for Participatory Budgeting.

Organised under the broader umbrella of the PB advisory group, membership has included representation from Community Foundation NI, Youthbank International, Triangle Housing Association, PSNI, Community Development Health Network, Corrymeela, Forward South Belfast and various representatives from local council areas, including public officials responsible for co-ordinating community planning processes.

The project has been funded by the Big Lottery Fund through Building Change Trust and delivered as part of the Trust's 'Creative Space for Civic Thinking' programme by Community Places to a value of £50,000 with the aim of delivering the following outcomes summarised in Figure 1.

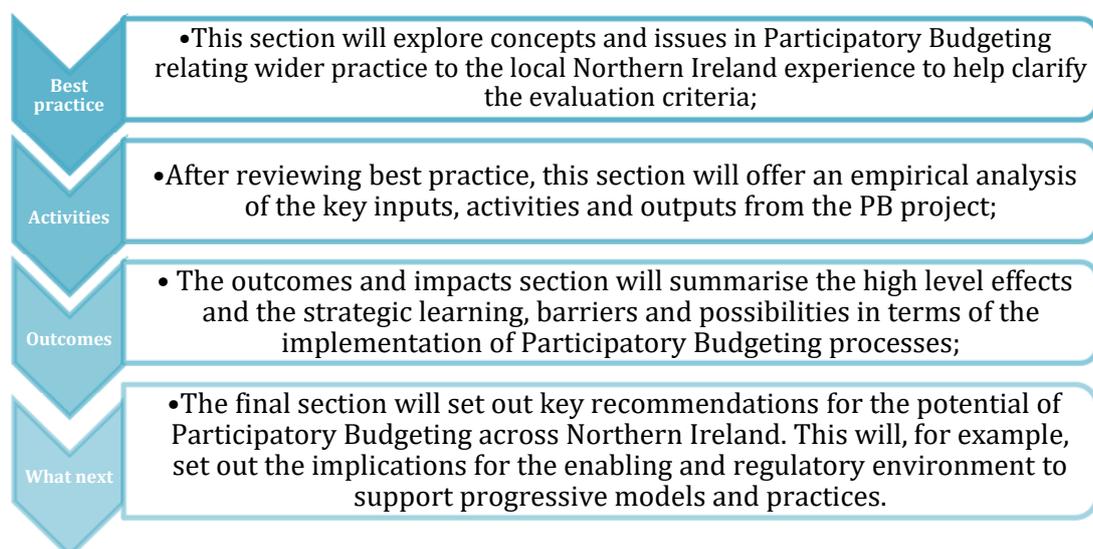
Figure 1 Expected outcomes of the PB Works project

- A participatory budgeting group/network established to advocate and support ongoing PB practice;
- Increased awareness, interest and knowledge of Participatory Budgeting and the values which underpin it across all sectors;
- Reduced barriers or concerns around the implementation or practice of Participatory Budgeting;
- Commitment from Local Councils, statutory, private, or community and voluntary groups to fund Participatory Budgeting pilots, which create opportunities to empower communities and individuals through increased involvement in how local resources are prioritised and spent;
- A number of Participatory Budgeting pilots to be planned, implemented and where complete learning identified.

2.3 Evaluation framework and data gathering methods

Figure 2 presents a more detailed outline of the evaluation framework, which examines the impact, learning and wider implications of the PB Works project. This framework will also examine how to create a more effective enabling environment for PB processes across Northern Ireland in the long term.

Figure 2 PB Works Evaluation Framework



The report is broadly organised around these areas and uses a range of data gathering methods to capture project effects. These have included: in-depth interrogation of secondary data held by the lead partner—Community Places; geocoded data on PB Workshops and events; a review of how the project was marketed to wider audiences, case study analysis of projects that received direct support from the PB project; as well as semi-structured in-depth interviews (n=15) with participants whose name, organisation and role is summarised in Figure 3. Both evaluators also attended the final PB training Workshop dedicated to housing and also presented the initial findings of the evaluation at the final PB learning event.

Figure 3 PB Works project interviewees

Interviewee	Organisation
David Quinney Mee	Community Development Worker RCDA
David Patterson	Head of Community Planning NMD Council
Lauren McMenamy	Partner Development Officer Community Planning NMD Council
Orla Watt	Independent Family Advocacy Co coordinator Parent Action
Martin Hamilton	Community Engagement Officer Newington Housing Association
Cathy Hall	Tackling Deprivation Officer Antrim and Newtownabbey Council
Jennifer Cole	Tackling Deprivation Officer Antrim and Newtownabbey Council
Carol Follis	Manager Policing and Community Safety Partnership Fermanagh and Omagh Council
Azadeh Sobout	Urban Regeneration Officer Forward South Belfast
Jez Hall	Facilitator PB partners
Mark Peters	Inspector, Policing with the Community Project PSNI
Noeleen Diver	Triangle Housing Association board member
Paul Braithwaite	Programme Manager Building's Change Trust
Kevin Murphy	Chief Officer, Voluntary Arts Ireland
Louise O'Kane	Planner and Engagement Officer Community Places

3 Local and International models of PB practice

PB can take many different forms, and be used to achieve very different objectives, depending on the degree of involvement of, and ultimately the power delegated to participants. However, this is not the only way in which approaches can vary and, despite sharing a common name, numerous different types of PB can be identified. Figure 4 has been put together using an evidence review provided by the Public Policy Institute for Wales (2017) and demonstrates how a number of typologies have been developed to try and classify different PB practices (see for example, Goldfrank, 2007, DCLG, 2011, Harkins & Escobar, 2015, and Allegretti et al, 2013). It is clear that across this literature some common dimensions of practice begin to emerge:

Figure 4 Common dimensions of PB practice

-
- **Level of participation:** what involvement means in terms of degree of control (e.g. inputting views versus making the decisions) and whether PB is used as a tool for empowering participants or as a consultation mechanism with little change in power dynamics and influence.
 - **Who is involved:** whether those who participate are, for example, citizens, representative groups, NGOs, or private companies.
 - **At what stage are participants involved:** broadly, there are four stages, all of which could involve participants: identifying needs, developing project proposals, selecting projects to be funded, monitoring effects.
 - **Method of involvement:** there are a wide range of possible approaches, but there are two broad categories – ‘deliberative’, which involves some form of debate among participants; or ‘aggregative’, where participants vote for their preferred outcome. Often PB can involve both deliberative and aggregative approaches.
 - **Scale:** PB has been implemented at different spatial scales (e.g. national, local, neighbourhood); with different types and levels of budget (e.g. small scale grant allocation, or setting priorities for, in some cases multi-million pound, mainstream budgets) and with different foci (e.g. making choices within a policy or thematic area, such as health, or across themes but within a geographical area).
 - **Whether and to what extent PB is redistributive:** PB has been used to redistribute wealth by allocating more resources to the poorest areas.
-

To contextualise the evaluation of local PB processes in Northern Ireland Figure 5 reviews notable examples of approaches to PB that have been implemented across different parts of the world. These examples highlight the multiple benefits of PB processes and start with an example of the original transformative processes of PB that were enacted in Porte Alegre which were designed primarily to help redistribute wealth. This is followed by a description of the Scottish experience, where to date approaches have tended to be less redistributive and instead intended to engage citizens in consultations about where and how sums of money ought to be spent. The final example focuses on local PB practice here in Northern Ireland and the impact of a highly localised expression of community based PB practice called the Big Dish Out.

Figure 5 The diversity of PB practice

PB in Porto Alegre

Sgueo (2016) shows how PB was introduced in Porto Alegre during the late 1980's and radically transformed how public funds were allocated throughout the city. There was a particular focus from the newly elected administration on redistributing wealth and improving the transparency of decision making to help avoid corruption. The most deprived areas were given more resources, and decisions over the allocation of new capital investments such as schools, roads, sanitation and healthcare were all made via PB processes. The success of PB in Porto Alegre—both as an engagement tool and redistributive mechanism has seen the city emerge a global reference point for best PB practice.

**PB in Scotland**

PB in Scotland has been increasing over the last few years and is viewed by the Scottish Government as a way of increasing citizen engagement in decision making. This ambition was developed into policy through the *Community Empowerment Act 2015*, which aimed (amongst other things) to strengthen citizens' voices in the decisions and services that matter most to them. To deliver this, the Scottish Government created the Community Choices fund (£1.5 million) dedicated to funding and supporting PB. This national budget is delivered locally and has a redistributive element with the funding targeted particularly in deprived areas. There has also been a broader commitment to mainstreaming PB practice as by 2021 1% of all local government budgets will be allocated in this way. In October 2018, a PB festival was held to raise awareness and strengthen the implementation of PB processes locally.

**PB in Northern Ireland**

The implementation of PB processes across NI has been modest; however, the 'The Big Dish Out' represents a local example that was delivered by the 'Waste No Time Team' with support from the Causeway Coast and Glens local council. After a lengthy engagement period which helped to promote and secure support for the process, two PB events took place with participation from Cross Glebe Community Association and a number of local groups in the Cushendall area. The agreed bid pot of £6,000 attracted bids from 32 different projects, which was eventually split 10 ways to support local projects with various objectives that included tackling isolation, improving community safety and promoting inter-generational activity. Although each project only received £300, the Big Dish Out provided local people with a greater sense of ownership as they were able to decide what issues were important to them and as a result resources were allocated with full community backing.



These examples of PB demonstrate how it can reflect a broad range of activities, problems, focus and different institutional contexts. Common across all these schemes is the increased involvement of the local community in the decision making and the distribution of a designated set of funds. However, it is also clear that the level and method of involvement varies significantly from full delegation of decision making and resource allocation, to light touch consultation.

4 Inputs, Activities and Outputs

Following the review of wider PB practice, this next section will offer an empirical analysis of the key inputs, activities and outputs from the PB project. This will involve outlining project expenditure; exploring the *effectiveness* of road shows in terms of creating greater awareness of PB across the region as well as the level of training activities and tailored support that was delivered during PB Works. Finally, it will examine what marketing strategies were used to raise the profile of the project and the impact they had in terms of increasing participation from various stakeholders operating across Northern Ireland.

4.1 PB project budget and expenditure

Community Places were appointed PB Works project lead and were thus responsible for co-ordinating all aspects of the project and acted as the main budget holder. Figure 6 provides a summary of the main expenditure relating to the delivery of the PB Works project from December 2017 to December 2018. The profile demonstrates an efficient form of delivery as only 20% (£10,000) of the budget was on administrative costs and 80% on service delivery, learning and show casing best practice.

Figure 6 PB Works project budget

Budget heading	BCT Contribution
Salary costs	
Project co-ordination by Community Places. Calculated at 1 Day per Week and Administrative support at 1 Hr per Week	£10,000
Sub-total Salary costs	£10,000
Overhead costs	
In-kind contribution from Community Places	
Sub-total Overhead costs	
Activity costs	
Establishment of PB Advisory Group and Support (Lobbying Role)	£1,500
Marketing and Communications (including Website)	£5,000
Road show Awareness Raising Events (x4) including travel and accommodation for speakers/advocates	£5,500
Tailored PB Training	£8,000
PB Facilitation and Support to PB Pilots	£15,000
Sub-total Activity Costs	£35,000
Monitoring, evaluation and learning costs	
Showcase and Learning Event (including PB Learning Video)	£5,000
Sub-total Monitoring, evaluation and learning	£5,000
TOTAL COST	£50,000

In terms of leverage, a number of funding pots were eventually established as a result of the PB Works supported pilots. This included £14,000 from a PB event hosted by Newry Mourne and Down District Council, £3,500 via the Policing and Community Safety Partnership in Fermanagh and Omagh, £1,000 from a local community PB event in Rathlin and a further £3,000 that will be allocated at an event held by Antrim and Newtownabbey council which will be dedicated to youth action and engagement. This total of £21,500 reflects a ratio of 1:43, which

means a return of 43p for every £1 spent. The scalability of such relationships should not be underestimated in the rollout of PB.

4.2 Road show and PB training events

A large proportion of the PB project budget was allocated to the organisation and delivery of a series of road shows and dedicated PB training events. The road show events (4 held in total) were designed to raise awareness of PB across NI; to demonstrate why and how people should get involved; and outline aspects of their organisation and potential impact. These events were open to anyone and were additionally used to share good PB practice from other parts of the UK; illustrate the variety of different approaches that are used in the context of PB (deliberation, grant awarding etc); explore the principles underpinning PB processes and finally how barriers or risks can be minimised during its implementation.

The training events (4 held in total) worked to develop these themes but also dedicated more time to better understanding specific operational PB issues. For example, how PB processes' could be augmented through digital engagement or how they might be made relevant to a particular policy area such as Housing or Workshop three which explored the importance of outcomes, accountability and evaluation. This Workshop was also the most well attended Workshop with 57 attendees and drew on the Scottish experience of PB through external input from COSLA, the Scottish Government and Audit Scotland. It also helped to demonstrate the proportional approach taken to PB across Scotland and evidence is already showing how this approach is helping to improve local accountability through greater involvement of communities in the decision-making process.

Figure 7 Timetable and attendance of PB Works road shows and training

Date	Venue	Road Show	Attendees	Registered
14.3.2018	Crescent Arts Centre	Project launch	65	39
15.3.2018	Sean Hollywood Arts Centre	Regional Event Newry	45	33
11.4.2018	Holywell Trust	Regional Event Derry/Londonderry	30	41
12.4.2018	Bawnacre Centre	Regional Event Irvinestown	25	35

Date	Venue	Training event	Attendees	Registered
13.6.2018	Play resource centre	The role of PB in widening engagement	19	22
20.6.2018	Play resource centre	Online and digital PB engagement	12	14
18.9.2018	Crescent Arts Centre	Outcomes, accountability and evaluation	57	65
5.11.2018	Duncairn Centre	Housing led PB approaches	26	34

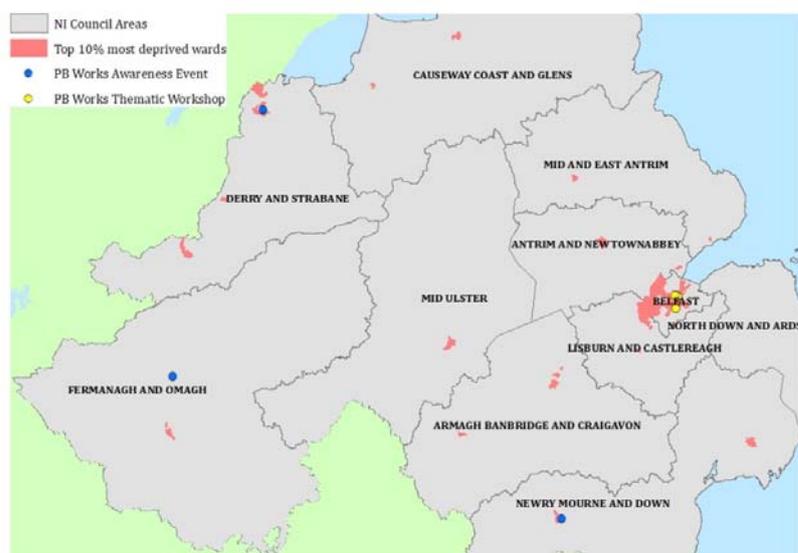
Figure's 7 and 8 demonstrate how both the road show and training events were well supported, with a total of 165 individuals attending the Northern Ireland wide road shows and 114 individuals attending the four training events also hosted in Belfast. In terms of engagement, participants were motivated by direct invitation from PB Works Advisory Group members whilst others became aware through other local networks that have emerged from other Building Change Trust supported initiatives such as the Civic Activism project or Northern Ireland's Open Government Network.

Figure 8 PB Works awareness event



There was strong praise for the events, especially in terms of their relevance and the timely support that was provided for those at various stages of the PB journey. road show events were useful as they also provided a platform for potential participants to connect with the PB advisory group and register their interest in terms of applying for more support through the PB project. They also enabled risks and processes to be better understood, evaluate best practice (in relevant areas, organisations or sectors) and explore the practicalities of scheme set-up and administration.

Figure 9 Spatial distribution of PB Works road show and training events



The spatial analysis presented in Figure 9 demonstrates how the PB project organised four Awareness Events (including the launch) across Belfast; Derry

and Strabane; Fermanagh and Omagh as well as Newry, Mourne and Down councils. The four training Workshops organised by the project were all held in venues located across Belfast.

The inclusion of the Multiple Deprivation Index measure as a map layer shows how 7 out of the 8 PB Works road shows and training Workshops were delivered in areas that ranked in the Top 10% in terms of deprivation. This demonstrates that the project provided a platform for disadvantaged communities to learn more about PB and explore its relevance in terms of tackling issues linked to poverty and deprivation.

4.3 Training and tailored support for PB pilots

Working closely with Jez Hall from the PB Network/Partners (see Figure 10) the project developed a suite of training resources and tailored support to best reflect the Northern Irish context. This support was delivered to project applicants via mentor-led consultancy and was allocated by an open application process that was administered by the PB advisory group across two stages.

Figure 10 Tailored PB support provided by PB partners

With over 15 years' experience of running successful Participatory Budgeting (PB) projects PB Partners assist in the delivery of community engagement processes that aim to empower citizens as well as seek out alternative ways to allocate public services and resources. Operated as a social enterprise PB Partners offer different types of support which include guidance on PB grant making, hosting of PB style events as well as bespoke training to staff, elected members and local residents. This support can be delivered from distance via mentoring or via sessional based work designed to ensure the effective delivery of PB processes.



The first stage of support that was allocated consisted of a total of 12 mentoring days. These were divided across three Pilot PB projects (4 days each); Rathlin Community and Development Association, Newry Mourne and Down District Council and Parent Action—a community interest company that provides support for carers of children with severe learning difficulties.

It was originally envisaged that a fourth pilot was to be funded but instead this support was re-profiled and allocated during a second support stage which benefited a further 4 PB projects—the Policing and Community Safety Partnership in Fermanagh and Omagh (2days), Antrim and Newtownabbey Council (2 days), Newington Housing Association in North Belfast (2days) and Forward South Belfast (1 day).

The information and support provided by PB partners was relevant, timely and helped to build the capacity of participating projects. This was critical, as projects that received support were at different stages in their engagement with PB. For example, some were on the cusp of being event ready whilst others were still exploring whether PB was relevant to the organisational objectives or how

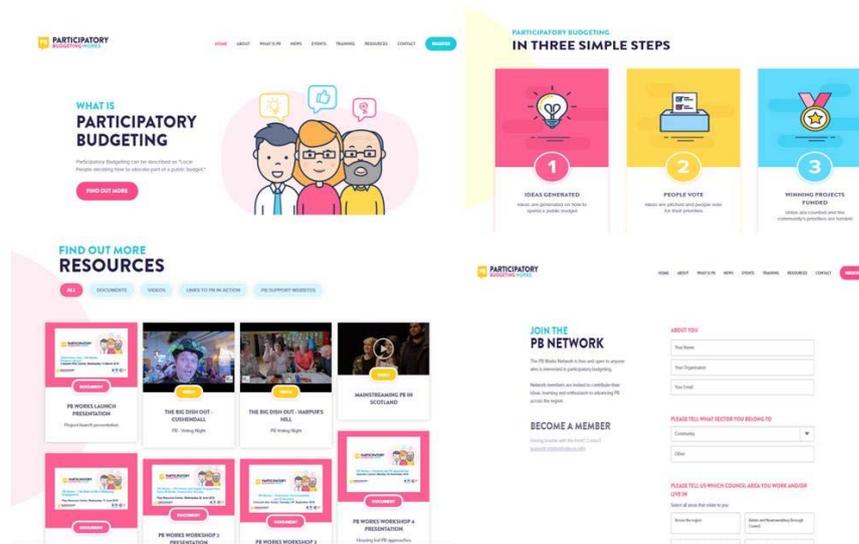
it could be made compatible with their values and systems. This is especially relevant for practitioners who were working within the confines of local authority or NDPBs where procurement and accountancy compliance often restrict the potential of flexible funding allocation models.

4.4 Marketing and communication of PB Works

In addition to the road shows and training Workshops, the PB Works project was marketed through an online website. A *communications plan* was developed at the outset and stressed the need to create a strong enabling environment for the project as well as to explore multiple ways in which users could get involved and access relevant information or support.

Figure 11 highlights the features of the PB website and how it provided a portal which has allowed a range of users to develop a better understanding of the concept. Presented in a lucid and accessible style, it has provided free access to promotional material and training resources which could be downloaded by individuals who were unable to attend the Workshops or showcase events.

Figure 11 The PB Works website



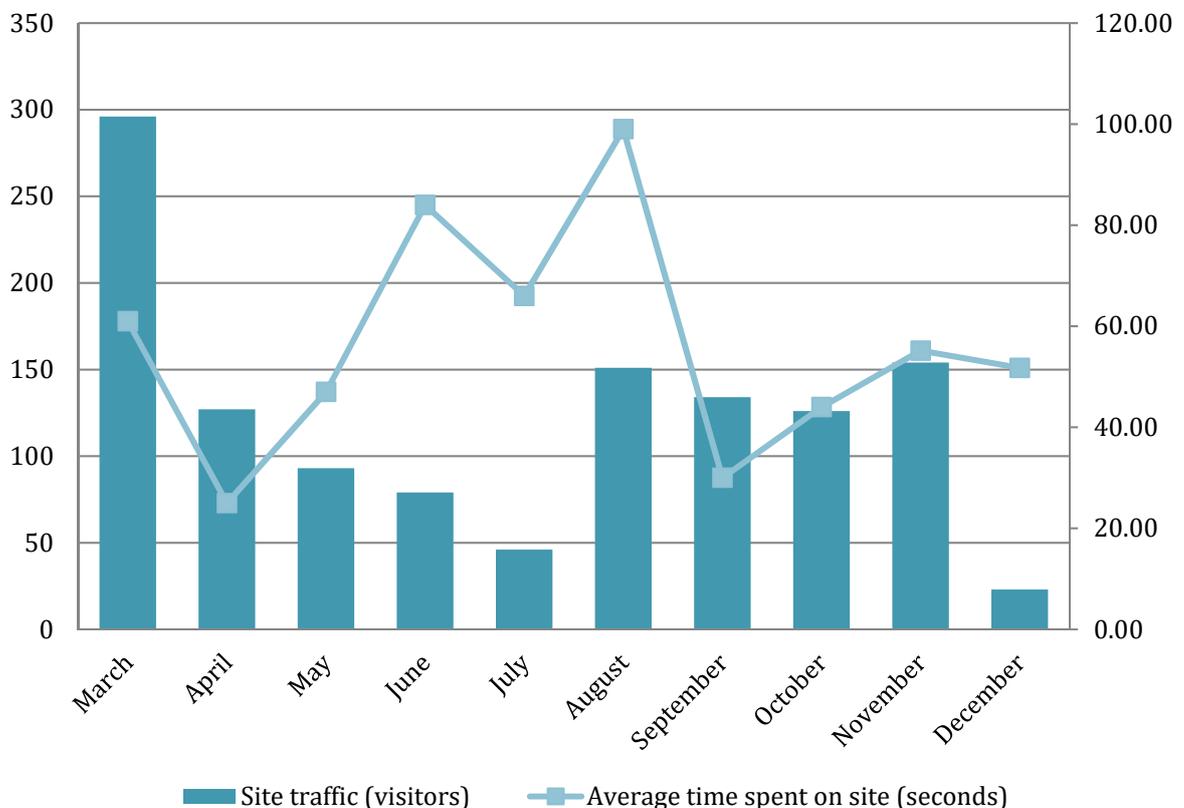
The online media and PB videos helped to share the learning experiences from previous local PB experiences such as ‘The Big Dishout’, especially for individuals, groups or professional practitioners who are aiming to integrate PB processes internally within their own organisations. Moving forward, this digital element of PB Works should be maintained and developed to ensure that internal resources are reflective of the Northern Irish experience and practice of PB.

Reflex Studios who were appointed to design and build the PB website also provided ongoing analytics to demonstrate how often the website was accessed and also how long users navigated the site once they connected online. A summary is presented in Figure 12 and demonstrate how, between its launch in

March 2018 and November 2018, a total of 1104 people accessed the website. The month with the highest number of users was in March (296) and the lowest was July (46).

Although site users decreased during the summer period, the average time increased to nearly 90 seconds per visit. The interviews later confirmed how this increase reflect the uptake in the number of individuals downloading PB resources and support content to learn more about the relevance and potential of the scheme. Website visitor numbers have since increased and remained consistent at the 120-150 mark throughout August-October. The average time spent on the site decreased slightly although recently this appears to have levelled off.

Figure 12 Data analytics from the PB Works website



Moving forward, the PB website represents a key resource, if the local momentum which has been generated is to be sustained. Post project and under the proposed stewardship of Community Places, it will be important that the website is sufficiently maintained and that interested parties are able to continue to access or share resources as well as subscribe to the region's growing PB network. The most recent figures demonstrate that there are currently 49 individuals that have signed up to this network and they represent a broad range of statutory agencies, local councils as well as community and voluntary organisations from across Northern Ireland.

4.5 Learning event

To mark the end of the funding period, the PB Works advisory group hosted a learning event located in the MAC, Belfast. The event reflected on some of the range of activities that had been delivered as well as to show some of the learning films that had been produced over the last year (see Figure 13 and also via the PB Works website <http://www.participatorybudgetingWorks.org/resources>)

Figure 13 Sharing PB practice and NI experiences at the learning event



It also involved input from PB partners who facilitated a reflection exercise in the afternoon to explore what was needed next to help embed PB across Northern Ireland. This was particularly useful as it enabled attendees who were representing various sectors-statutory government departments, the community and voluntary sector and higher education-to come together and discuss PB in a deliberative roundtable format. A highlights summary of some of the issues that emerged from this roundtable session will be used to develop the next phase of PB work. Figure 13 also shows how the learning event provided a platform for those who had received support from PB Works to share some of their experiences of processes, impacts on participants and their plans for the future.

5 Outcomes and Impacts of PB Works

This section of the evaluation will reflect on the outcomes and impacts of the PB Works project as well as summarise the high-level effects, the learning, challenges, barriers and possibilities in terms of the broader implementation of PB across Northern Ireland. This has emerged from documenting the reflections from 15 semi-structured interviews with a broad cross section of stakeholders that participated or had some degree of contact with the PB Works project. This includes members of the PB advisory group, individual project facilitators and representatives from local projects that attended some of the road shows/training Workshops or received direct support as a result of the PB project.

This section will also provide a case study analysis of the 3 individual projects that received the first round of technical and mentoring support provided through the project by PB partners. This analysis will contribute to the production of a local evidence base that will help develop a better understanding of how and to what impact PB processes are operating on the ground across Northern Ireland.

5.1 Stakeholder perspectives

5.1.1 Success factors of the project and PB processes in Northern Ireland

There was unanimous praise for the advice and **technical support** provided throughout the PB Works project by PB partners. This support was viewed by recipients as timely and the practical experience of dedicated PB practitioners was highly relevant. This was especially the case when helping projects to address specific operational challenges, technical aspects of implementation and identifying risks to the host agency. Clearly, this assistance has helped to **build capacity** and **increase the skills and competencies** of individuals responsible for organising PB activities across Northern Ireland. It is the development of such local competencies and skill sets which will be crucial to **sustaining but also scaling PB practice** across the region in the long term. Interesting, the events and projects cut across organisations, sectors and regions **emphasising a collective interest in PB** as a method of participation and decision making. This was not just a *push* from the community, but reflected a broader concern among Councils, agencies and larger voluntary organisations to engage a different way of allocating resources within their control.

The implementation of PB processes to date although modest has also encouraged **groups or projects that have benefited from allocated funding, to be more accountable for their own delivery outcomes**. For example, Triangle Housing Associations' experience with PB has demonstrated that by allocating resources at a local community event increased transparency and a **greater obligation on funding recipients** to deliver their agreed projects. By hosting a follow up celebration event, both funded and non-funded projects were invited to report back on what they had delivered under **collective scrutiny** of others involved in the PB process. This demonstrated participation

and greater community involvement at all stages of the allocation process, thus placing greater accountability on those who benefited from the initial allocation process.

Some of the PB processes that have been developed with support from PB Works have placed a strong emphasis on ***allocating resources to groups or individuals that are or have been previously excluded from mainstream funding programmes***. This was evident in the PB event hosted in October 2018 by the Police and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) in Fermanagh and Omagh called “Community Cash”. After working closely with PB partners, the PCSP used their local event to advertise and allocate £3,500 of its annual budget to 7 different project ideas, many of which were proposed by groups that were un-constituted and had limited or no previous experience of applying for grant funding. The event was attended by 61 people from the Lisnaskea Area who voted in the funding round resulting in a fairer distribution that included unfamiliar and less well organised groups. The implementation of PB processes locally can potentially challenge a concern that local funding favours certain groups or areas and ***if managed appropriately, can help to allocate resources in a more transparent and democratic way***.

Figure 14 Community Cash event held by the PCSP in Lisnaskea



One of the road show events was attended by the current ***Auditor General who publicly expressed support for the wider use of PB processes*** in Northern Ireland. This support is timely and relevant, particularly considering the findings of a recently published report by the NI Audit Office in November 2018 which has raised concerns around how public money was allocated through high level government initiatives such as the Social Investment Fund. If managed correctly, PB processes can help to address such concerns and ***increase local accountability*** around how government money and resources are allocated to communities. Thus, ***PB can represent a practical tool*** to help improve the representation of communities across a range of decision making arenas.

Previous research has shown how the success of PB projects depends on the level and nature of the participation as well as the broader aims of the process. Clearly, the scale of PB activity in Northern Ireland to date has been modest but already PB practitioners have praised its ***flexibility*** as well as its capacity to

source ***innovative solutions*** to help tackle pressing or challenging local issues. This is useful, especially for Councils who are keen to explore the potential of new community based approaches to ***addressing traditionally challenging policy areas*** such as youth engagement. For example, in December 2018, Antrim and Newtownabbey will host their very first PB event which will involve young people proposing a local project idea then pitching for £3,000 of funding support. This PB event is integrated within the broader objectives of the *Neighbourhood Action Plan* so it will be important to a) Examine what ideas actually emerge from this deliberative process b) Record the levels of engagement and participation from the young people themselves and c) Demonstrate what impact and outcomes emerge from the projects that receive funding support.

The Housing Seminar highlighted significant interest across social housing providers including the NIHE and leading local associations such as Triangle. It was noted that Shared Housing Schemes funded with TCI uplift under the TBUC programme had significant finance to support community cohesion. Triangle—a Housing Association with experience of PB and shared housing for tenants with learning difficulties raised the ***potential to use the scheme to give tenants a greater say in how such funding should be prioritised***. Funders in the past have tended to introduce pre-set schemes based on mediation training and contact but Triangle suggested that PB would involve the community in; co-designing such interventions; developing programmes that met with their everyday experiences living in integrated housing; and ***implementing projects that they felt would strengthen quality of life*** and sustain the estate as a shared scheme.

5.1.2 Limitations of the project and PB processes in Northern Ireland

PB Works has made a ***strong effort to better understand the impact and learning with respect to its expected project outcomes***. Some of this impact has been captured across this evaluation report but has also been well documented through its online website and the production of a learning film. Admittedly, PB processes across Northern Ireland are still underdeveloped and are at varying stages in terms of their actual delivery. To date, some organisations like Triangle Housing Association have worked hard to showcase learning from their own PB processes by ***hosting successful celebration events*** to demonstrate what has been delivered after PB funding was allocated. However, this approach could be further supported via ***a robust monitoring and evaluation framework*** which can help to assess local PB outcomes against pre-defined measurable criteria. This would make it easier to evaluate the cumulative ***economic, social or environmental impact of PB activity on service users*** as well as to compare or benchmark outcomes against other examples of PB activity.

Some practitioners raised concerns around ***how to effectively integrate PB processes into existing local government structures***. Despite useful input and mentoring from PB partners, some council staff highlight the need to brand their PB practice with a ***'pilot' status in order to ease fears, broker trust but***

critically to help secure funding commitments from more senior departmental budget holders. Unlike Scotland where PB has become a more established practice across various levels of government, it lacks the political and legislative support to mainstream it into existing institutional arrangements in Northern Ireland. Despite the well timed awareness raising efforts of the PB Works project, more dedicated work needs to be done to explore how to embed PB practices into current council systems and structures across the region.

These experiences also reflect how the practice of PB, especially in local councils *is still very much at an experimental stage.* Stakeholder experiences of current PB practitioners have already identified a number of operational challenges, especially with respect to *navigating internal bureaucracy* as well as the *added checks and balances that regularly emerge when public money is being allocated.* At present, the level of funding allocated via PB processes is relatively small so it is quite straightforward to comply with the existing procurement guidance. However, if PB is to be scaled to the level it currently operates in Scotland and also as a mechanism to allocate much larger public budgets, this could create potential internal tensions with Accounting Officers, procurement and audit staff.

As yet, few *projects have been delivered in areas that have been historically been most affected by internal community divisions,* namely those occupying inner city areas of Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. The 'Big Dish Out' attracted cross community representation by involving constituents from both traditionally Unionist and Nationalist communities in Causeway Coast and Glens Council. However, the issues currently facing these rural areas are quite different to the levels of segregation and poverty encountered in inner city areas. It is in this context, that the work of Newington Housing Association represents an important example of how a local community based organisation is experimenting with the adoption of PB processes in the deprived and divided context of North Belfast. To date, Newington has experimented with PB style techniques and processes to encourage their tenants to become more active in the delivery of local services. Moving forward, they are also working with a large social enterprise, Ashton Community Trust, to explore with support from PB Works how PB can be used to allocate 'community funding awards' and improve community relations across interface neighbourhoods.

5.2 Case studies

Similar to the examples presented in section 2, the use of Participatory Budgeting (PB) in Northern Ireland helps to explain the range of engagement activities, scheme design and project outcomes supported in the project. In the three examples presented, local people have been directly involved in the decision-making process, although the level and method of their involvement has varied from light touch consultation to a direct vote on how funding or resources should be allocated.

1) Rathlin – Grugach’s Gold

Who is the organisation behind the project and how was PB used?

- Rathlin Development and Community Association (RDCA) is the representative body for the Rathlin Island Community. It is concerned with improving the quality of life for those living on the island as well as promoting a sustainable model of community development that is sensitive to Rathlin’s natural environment. The RDCA applied to PB Works to assist them establish a PB process which would allow islanders the opportunity to pitch and vote for ideas that would create direct benefits for the wider Rathlin community. This PB approach was also used to help reconnect the islanders with a local social enterprise called the Manor House and also to explore how surplus income generated from its activities could be re-distributed in a fair and inclusive way. The total value of the funding pot that local groups could bid for was £1,000.



What was delivered with support from the PB Works project?

- On consultation with representatives from PB partners and with additional support from individuals organising the *Big Dish Out*, the RDCA hosted a PB event on the 3rd November 2018. Prior to the event the islanders were encouraged to put forward ideas and a total of 9 were presented to 35 members of the wider Rathlin community (about one-quarter of the total population). In total, 4 ideas were successful in securing £250 each. These included the production of a CD for the local community choir, a residential trip for local young people, equipment for the local football team and funding to tidy up the graveyard.



What were the outcomes of PB project at Rathlin?

- Although the event was only held at the start of November 2018, the RDCA are already monitoring the progress of projects. They are also working with other projects that were unsuccessful in anticipation of launching a similar style PB event next year.
- Engaging with PB has helped the Rathlin community realise its commitment to internal democratic processes and has also developed its capacity to manage and allocate income from its own social enterprise.
- Learning how to distribute this community surplus in inclusive ways is also important given the broader aspirations of the RDCA to develop a community owned wind turbine. If successful, this would provide the island with a sustainable income stream in the long term.

2) Parent Action CIC – Getting our voices heard

Who is the organisation behind the project and how was PB used?

- Parent Action CIC work to provide support for parent carers of children, young people and adults with disabilities or long term health conditions in the Downpatrick area. They also work to improve local services by increasing the level of dialogue between the parents themselves as well as health, education and social care professionals as way to improve local services.
- Parent Action CIC has attempted to use PB processes to strengthen these existing communicative channels by increasing the opportunities for parents to share their experiences and issues with the relevant professionals.

What was delivered with support from the PB Works project?

- By drawing down support from the PB project, Parent Action NI has used the mentoring to help facilitate and set the agenda for four meetings between parent carers and local health, education and social care professionals.

What were the outcomes of the PB Works project at Parent Action CIC?

- In this example PB processes have helped to provide a deliberative platform which has allowed parents and professionals to put forward a series of ideas which will be pitched via a video proposal at the second PB event hosted by Newry, Mourne and Down Council in November 2018.
- Parent Action CIC have not used PB to allocate resources, rather to deliberate and generate ideas/potential projects that could provide additional help and support for parent carers living across the Downpatrick area.
- Those involved with the delivery of Parent Action CIC outlined the difficulties parent carers face when sourcing appropriate care on a regular basis. This might make it difficult for some parent carers to actively participate in a PB public event. Therefore, the opportunity to propose their ideas via a digital format is hugely empowering and demonstrates how the use of digital technology can increase the inclusive nature of PB processes.

3) Newry Mourne and Down – Communities Leading Change***Who is the organisation behind the project and how was PB used?***

- Working with the local *Community Development and Health Network*, Newry Mourne and Down District Council held a small 'In it to win it' pilot in the Slieve Croob District Electoral Area (DEA) in March 2018. The event attracted participation from ten local community groups pitching for a share of £1,000 with three successful winners. The open, transparent and inclusive nature of the process was praised by local councillors and the community alike.
- Building on this success, NMD Council approached PB Works with the aim of expanding their PB approach by organising additional PB events across the Mourne DEA. The delivery of these events will tie in closely to existing community planning priorities and are focussed on specific themes such as rural isolation, wellbeing, and youth engagement.

What was delivered with support from the PB Works project?

- Drawing on support from PB partners, the Council hosted one PB event, again under the theme of 'Communities Leading Change' in October 2018. It also hosted a second event which took place in November 2018 which experimented with the use of online digital engagement platforms as a way to help reach out to individuals or groups that may not be able to attend the event in person as well as local young people.
- The funding pot for the October PB event was set at £14,000 and involved contributions from other agencies such as the PSNI, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, both local Health Trusts as well as a dedicated proportion of the NMD community planning budget. In total, nine groups presented bids and six were successful in taking home a share of the pooled budget.
- NMD are exploring the possibility of hosting a celebration event which will be used to share the learning and outcomes from their own PB practices to date.



What were the outcomes of the PB Works project at NMD Council?

- Ultimately, PB processes have empowered local community groups as it has provided them with an opportunity to decide what is important to them with respect to their own area. It has also helped them to secure resources to implement their ideas with the full backing of both the NMD council as well as members of the local community.
- Both PB events have seemingly helped to improve relations and trust between the council and the community especially to better understand local needs and priorities behind community planning.
- The second PB event hosted by NMD Council was focussed on young people and looked to increase engagement by experimenting with the use of online digital platforms such as Facebook. As well as 150 young people attending the event in person, a further 2000 also participated in an online voting ballot.
- This demonstrates how PB can be enacted across virtual platforms to help boost local engagement. It was particularly relevant in this case as the focus of the event was young people who demonstrated both the confidence and willingness to participate in PB processes when hosted online. The local council must also be commended in their efforts to be innovative and explore how digital platforms can be used effectively to help support the hosting of a PB event.
- Finally, NMD Council has developed an independent link with Leuven University and are participating in a study which explores the value of engaging with deliberative decision-making processes. The learning from this research will be useful to help share the effectiveness of Northern Ireland PB practice but may also provide useful guidance on how it could be scaled or become more embedded in existing local government structures, especially linked to community planning.



6 Implications and recommendations

6.1 Growing the enabling environment

The road shows and training Workshops have provided a useful and highly effective platform to help raise awareness about the regional value of PB processes. These events have certainly contributed to a more effective enabling environment, one important outcome being the ***development of an internal PB network***. The value of a network of PB practitioners and advocates was demonstrated recently when individuals involved with the 'Big Dish Out' provided informal advice and support to others that were organising their own event in Rathlin. Clearly, this network is already ***helping to share knowledge, skills and local PB experiences*** whilst at the same time ***reducing the workload and reputational risk*** for those responsible for implementing local PB processes or events elsewhere. Community Places is well placed to help grow this enabling environment as well as the local PB advisory group/network via the current PB website.

It will be critical to consolidate some of the learning and practical support that has been provided by PB partners, which was valued so highly by project participants. This could be through the ***development of a local PB toolkit or operation manual*** that could be designed to reflect the local Northern Ireland context. Either resource might include specific template documents which could relate to the implementation of a PB event (funding application forms, letters of offers, agreement forms, voting ballots etc) or further guidance outlining how to overcome specific operational challenges linked to delivery.

It will be important to explore alternative ways to ***help maintain the momentum*** that has been built around the promotion of PB and to help scale its impact in the short to medium term. The role of PB partners has been critical to delivering effective PB practice but with project funding coming to an end, it will be important to consider the ***value of training local facilitators who could act in an advisory capacity to help others implement their own local PB processes***. The PSNI have already been highly pro-active in terms of educating key staff about the merits of PB techniques through a series of in-service Workshops. The organisation of these sessions has involved input from PB partners, independent from the PB project. However, there is no reason why such a role could not be performed by the PB Works Advisory Group led by Community Places with practical experience of mobilising PB processes across Northern Ireland. ***Community Places possess a large amount of operational knowledge; skills and PB experience to provide interested parties with technical support as and when required.***

It is comparatively easy to suggest more grant funding to continue a worthwhile programme. However, there is an appetite for PB given a broader disillusionment with politics (55% turnout at the last NI by-election), cynicism about representative party politics and the suspension of the Assembly and scandals in the use of public money. PB has created a space for people to engage

in active decision making, created trust with public institutions (albeit modestly in the case of local government) and developed new skills, understandings and influence over decision making. It was noted that the Scottish Government has a core programme for PB and given institutional uncertainty and Community Planning in particular, the opportunity to support active participation in policy and decisions should be a pressing one. ***A core programme (say £500,000-£750,000) could move PB from incubation to consolidation over the next three years.*** It is, of course, important to be realistic about how far and how quickly this might be developed but there is a solid platform, willing actors and sectoral diversity on which to base the next phase of growth. The financial leverage achieved, the proto-pooled budgeting and interagency working is clearly at a demonstrator level. But PB does show that it has the capacity to create the type of integrative working, a focus on outcomes, meaningful engagement with local people that are all advocated across government, *total place*, approaches. This might, at least, open a conversation with the *Department for Communities* about the feasibility of mainstreaming PB as part of its community development strategy for Northern Ireland. Other opportunities may also open around civic society in the new PEACE PLUS Programme as well as the (largely underdeveloped) donor investment sector. ***A strategic analysis of funding opportunities should map out possible grant support for PB in Northern Ireland.***

6.2 Systems and processes

A more robust PB monitoring evaluation framework could be developed to help capture individual project outputs and benchmark performance in order to explore how PB processes create local impact as well as better understand the value added for both communities and service users. This may involve ***developing standard measurable outputs linked to economic, social, cultural or environmental activity/performance*** and indicators that reflect how participating in ***PB processes can also positively impact on personal development, confidence levels, individual skills and competencies as well as personal well-being.***

Running parallel to the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework needs to be a sound reflection on how PB practice can be embedded into existing institutional arrangements, specifically local councils. This will involve ***drawing on the practical and process learning from agencies involved in implementing PB processes.*** One area this might focus on is how to navigate procurement issues, which will inevitably arise when public funding from a PB event or process is allocated. (Many of the spending levels or delegated or *de-minimis* so fall outside regulatory control.) This is critical and needs to be considered despite a public endorsement from the current Auditor General advocating the wider use of PB. For example, PB would attract greater financial scrutiny if it was scaled up to reflect the level of practice in other institutional contexts such as Scotland. It is therefore important that ***PB advocates and practitioners work closely with local council finance departments, the Audit Office as well as government accounting guidelines*** to provide sector specific guidance on how PB can be managed and delivered effectively in practice.

6.3 PB scope and future application

There are clearly a number of development opportunities for PB, but given the experience of the project to date; four specific areas might be considered in the next phase of PB Works:

- a. **Community Planning:** The evaluation demonstrates how PB has proved effective in improving public confidence, especially in terms of the performance of local councils to allocate resources to issues that matter most to communities. It will be important for the local PB network to continue to support the development of these processes and explore how they *align with community planning*. The integration of agency budgets, giving local people control over resource allocation and focusing on particular issues (especially young people) provides an ideal framework for PB. A specific programme on *What PB can do for Community Planning*, might for example, place the initiative on the agenda of local authorities across Northern Ireland. NMD have made an important contribution here and the ability to transfer practice, address risks and uncertainty and work across programme themes, would be important here. As noted earlier, this is resource intensive and would need some degree of programme support to roll out across 11 Councils.

- b. **Active Citizen Engagement:** Evidence presented in this evaluation demonstrates how *PB represents an alternative and highly innovative tool for engaging with local communities*. This was endorsed at the learning event through support from the Department for Communities and moving forward there is certainly potential to develop PB in partnership with other relevant organisations such as Community Foundation Northern Ireland, potentially in the context of their emerging innovation fund. A previous recommendation has already highlighted the need for a strategic mapping exercise to help identify potential funding or donor opportunities which could work to embed local PB practice further. This exercise could focus on relevant funding or donor streams which aim to promote active citizen engagement and may include the Big Lottery Fund and their People and Communities programme as well as Esmee Fairburn's Social Change initiative. Both of these examples aim to increase participation with marginalised individuals and groups and could certainly be developed further within the context of PB. Another relevant funding stream that could be explored is the Big Lottery Fund's Empowering Young people award, which might also be relevant especially given the recent success of the second PB event which was hosted by Newry Mourne and Down Council. It would be important to clearly identify the impact of the proposal in creating a distinct arena for participatory practice. The evaluation has highlighted the significant value added of PB in consultation processes, especially given the fragile politics of Northern Ireland:
 - Building trust between service users and public sector organisations including local authorities, the Housing Executive and the police;

- Giving the user a real stake in decision making compared with passive participatory methods that have created a sense of fatigue among over consulted communities;
 - Enabling a stronger network of sectoral interests to pool their budgets, expertise and standards in adopting PB, such as in the housing association sector;
 - Smoothing relationships in ‘difficult areas’ such as policing and shared housing because there is an active stake in decision making in a more agreed way;
 - Working at scale to mobilise large numbers of people in a focused and efficient way that produces a direct *outcome* that participants can tangibly see;
 - Reaching out to underserved communities and interest groups with real potential in areas such as young people, loneliness (and age in general) and shared communities; and
 - Efficient method of delivery by keeping overheads low, smart use of technology and leverage finance, in-kind and community resources. The leverage rate of £1: £0.43p is impressive given the scale of the PB pilot and shows how it can effectively integrate service delivery and resource planning.
- c. **Community relations and alliances:** The housing sector has considerable potential with a range of Associations bringing PB into their tenant participation systems in various ways. The Housing Executive has also endorsed the initiative and could be a potential partner in scaling PB, including with partners in health and social care, community development and youth services. The ***Shared Housing schemes being rolled out*** under the Towards Building a United Community (TBUC) initiative contain an uplift fund to support community development and relationship building. To date, practice has been patchy, but the Triangle approach suggests that PB would offer a useful framework for implementing the *community chest* element of their scheme. In the medium term, the integration of PB into the youth sector, divided communities and addressing common opportunities for formal and informal community funds, would have strong appeal for the proposed EU PEACE PLUS Programme.
- d. **Developer contributions:** In the consultation phase for the new Belfast Local Development Plan, *Forward South Belfast Partnership*, is a community based organisation who is proposing ***how PB could be used to help redistribute the funds accrued from local developer contributions***. This would help to address some of the concerns arising from neighbourhoods who benefit little from recent planning agreements across Belfast, especially those linked to the development of PBMSA’s (Purpose Built Managed Student Accommodation). Moving forward, LDP consultations could ***provide PB practices across Northern Ireland with a relevant spatial focus and dedicated legislative agenda***—in this case the implementation of planning agreements and section 76 across Belfast.

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