



Introducing You Decide!

'Keep up the good work. Involve residents all the time; especially in decision making.' (LAP 4 resident)

You Decide! is a Participatory Budgeting (PB) project. Whilst PB has many different definitions, for the purpose of this project PB:

'is the practice of enabling local communities to prioritise and allocate local council budgets'.

The four central tenets of PB that we were working towards were as follows:

- Direct participation of individuals in setting budget priorities;
- Deliberation;
- The formation of a social contract and;
- Renewed accountability.

The original Project Initiation Document for the You Decide! project set out the three aims for this project:

- To introduce PB as a tool to deliver LAA targets
- To introduce PB as a core competency within the council and in turn to strengthen transparent and accountable budgetary decision making within and across key delivery services
- To continue to strengthen participatory engagement, local democracy and resident empowerment in Tower Hamlets

These aims underpin the Participatory Budgeting model behind the You Decide! process.

Describing You Decide!

"The residents have given us a clear direction and the steering group members will work closely with the council to ensure that these services will be delivered in the next financial year!" (Doros Ullah: LAP 7)

You Decide! is a four stage process:

- 1) Developing menus of services that match LAP priorities
- 2) Residents 'decide' which services to purchase
- 3) The LAP Steering Groups work with the services to ensure that they meet local requirements
- 4) The services are evaluated and their performance monitored by the LAP Steering Groups

At this stage we are able to evaluate the first two phases of this process as the latter two are still to come.

Phase 1 (the development of the menus) was carried out by council officers. The menus were then taken to, and approved by, cabinet.

Phase 2 (the You Decide! events) took the form of widely attended public events where residents listened to presentations from the service providers, deliberated about which were the priorities for their local area and then voted on which services they would like their money to be spent on. The

council allocated £140,000 for each ward thus meaning a budget of £280,000 for LAPs 2-8 and £420,000 for LAP 1 (which has three wards). A full description of the process is provided in Appendix 1.

What was purchased?

No two LAPs were the same and every one of them purchased substantially different items with their money. A full breakdown of the items purchased is provided in Appendix 2 but among the most popular items were:

- Youth Inclusion Programme
- Youth Inclusion and Support Panel
- Early GCSE in the Mother Tongue
- Street Lighting
- Drug Outreach Worker
- Extended Learning
- Family Learning
- Youth Disabilities Project
- Shrub Beds

Evaluating You Decide!

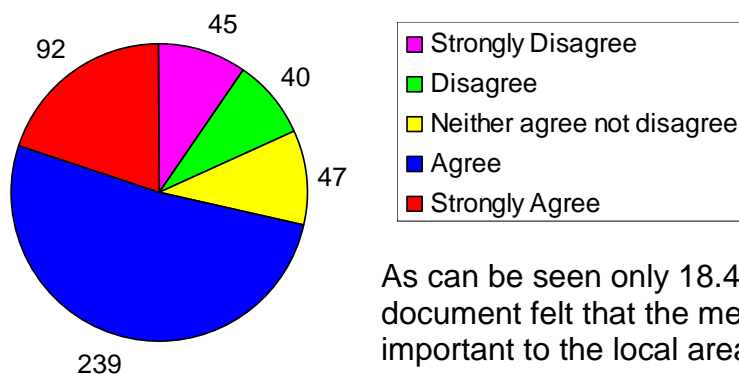
This evaluation document draws on a number of different sources:

- Evaluation forms from the You Decide! events
- Equalities monitoring from the events
- Analysis of the voting patterns at each event
- Staff feedback from the events; captured at a feedback meeting
- Observations from the projects team taken throughout the process.

You Decide! The Menu

“The public should decide on what they want the money spent on i.e. come up with their own list.” (LAP 7 resident)

The You Decide! menu was developed by council officers. It was based on priorities set by members of the LAP Steering Groups but the final decisions were still made by the council. A lot of PB best practice recommends that members of the public help set the menu (a point made by the resident from LAP 7 above). As this was not the case in Tower Hamlets, it was especially important to ensure that the service options identified met the requirements of the community.



The chart on the left hand side shows the response people gave to the statement:

‘I feel that the menu options provided today represented services that are important in my local area’

As can be seen only 18.4% of the people who completed the evaluation document felt that the menu did not represent services that were important to the local area.

Undoubtedly, the process could be more participatory but the menus represented a good set of choices reflecting the concerns of the community. Most concerns about the menu options were related to services that were not on the menu.

The two most common items that people requested were:

- Services for older people
- Health services and services to promote/support healthy living

The Formal Evaluation

'A good first step towards involving the local community but should go a lot further.' (LAP 3 resident)

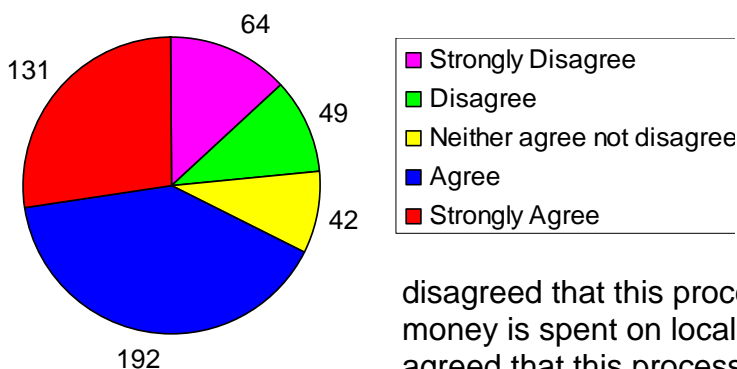
Our evaluation was designed to capture three things:

- Our progress against NI. 4: Strengthening Influence, empowerment, participation, leadership
- Our progress against NI. 5: General satisfaction with local area
- The effectiveness of the model and process chosen. This captured aspects of how the process met our targets around deliberation, decision making & co-production (captured within the community contract).

In order to capture this and create a baseline against which the rest of the You Decide! project could be measured we provided six specific statements designed to answer each point and asked the residents to tell us if they: strongly agreed, agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed with them.

335 out of 815 people completed the evaluation form representing a 41.1% response rate.

In terms of NI 4 the first of two highly relevant questions that we asked was as follows:

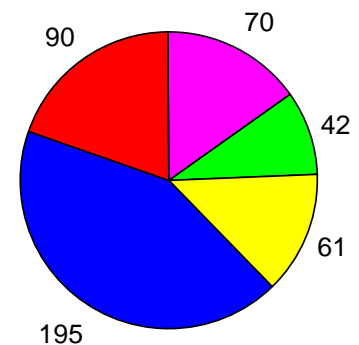
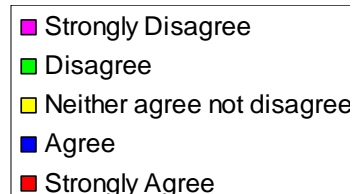


'I feel that today's event was a good way to decide where money is spent on local services'

As can be seen from the chart on the left, 23.7% of people either disagreed or strongly disagreed that this process helped them have a greater say over where money is spent on local services. However, 27.4% of people strongly agreed that this process helped them have more control. This ties in closely with the aspirations of NI 4 and should help us meet this target.

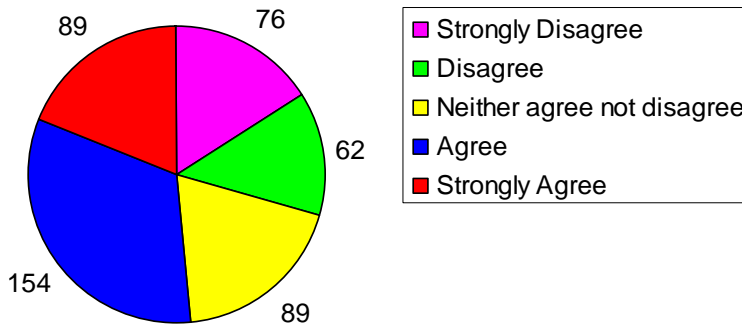
The second major question we asked to test NI 4 was: **'I feel that the You Decide! Project strengthens my level of influence over local services'** as shown on the right hand side.

This showed a slightly different result with only 18.8% strongly agreeing and 23.4% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Both of these results suggest a positive contributor to NI 4 targets being provided by this project.



As part of our efforts to ensure that the answers to above question had some context we also asked a more general question about 'local influence'. This was designed to measure whether the 'influence' provided by this event was greater or lesser than that residents generally experienced in their local area.

We achieved this by asking residents whether they agreed with the statement: **'I feel that I have a high level of influence over where money is spent on local services in my area'**. The results were less positive with 18.9% strongly agreeing and 29.4% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (see below)

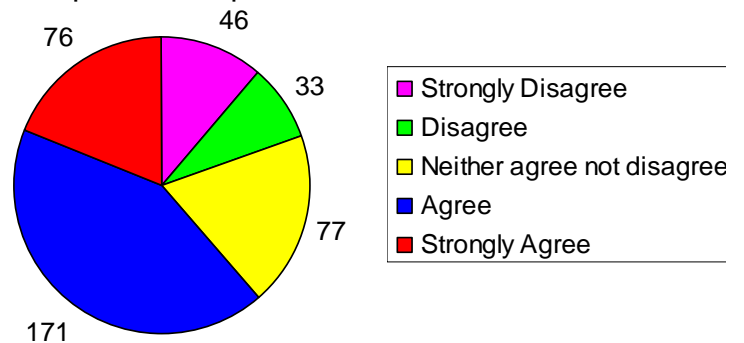


This suggests that the You Decide! events helped the council towards a better achievement of NI 4 than would have been the case without the events.

In terms of NI 5 we only had one statement which required a response. This was:

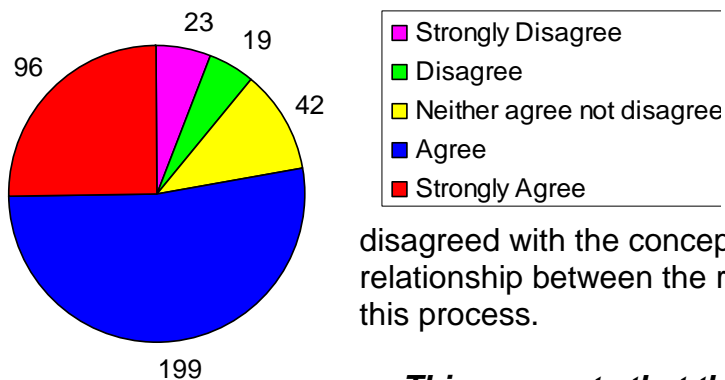
'I feel that You Decide! will help to improve my level of satisfaction with my local area.'

The response to this was fairly positive with only 19.6% feeling that the event did not strengthen their influence over local services and fully 60.5% believing that the You Decide! process strengthens their level of influence over local services. Our expectation is that this will increase even further as the rest of the process is completed.



There were two questions discussing the process. The first question asked whether people understood the event. Only 15.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that: **'I feel today's event had a clear purpose which I understood.'** This shows that there is room for improvement but also suggests that by and large the events were carried out in a way that included people and helped them take part.

The other question we asked related to the Community Contracts, which we saw as the key means of embedding elements of user-involvement and co-production going forward. With this in mind the statement we presented to the attendees was:

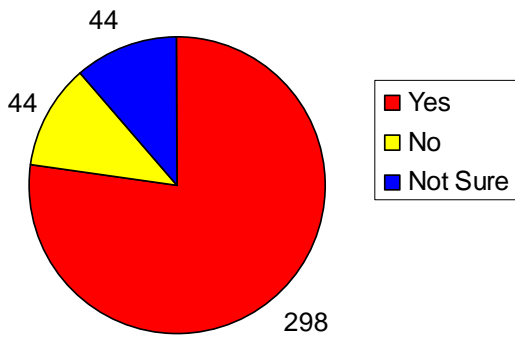


'I feel that a contract between the community and the service will be a helpful way to improve local services and my participation within them'

Only 11.1% of people disagreed or strongly disagreed with the concept of using a community contract to define the relationship between the residents, Steering Group and the services within this process.

This suggests that the idea of the Community Contract was well supported and it makes sense for us to build on this in the future as we try to embed aspects of co-production and shared ownership as central parts of the participatory process.

Finally, we asked people if we should do this again. 298 people said yes (77.2%) and only 44 (11.4%) said no.



This suggests that whatever people's concerns about the process it is well supported. The challenge is to meet people's aspirations for next year.

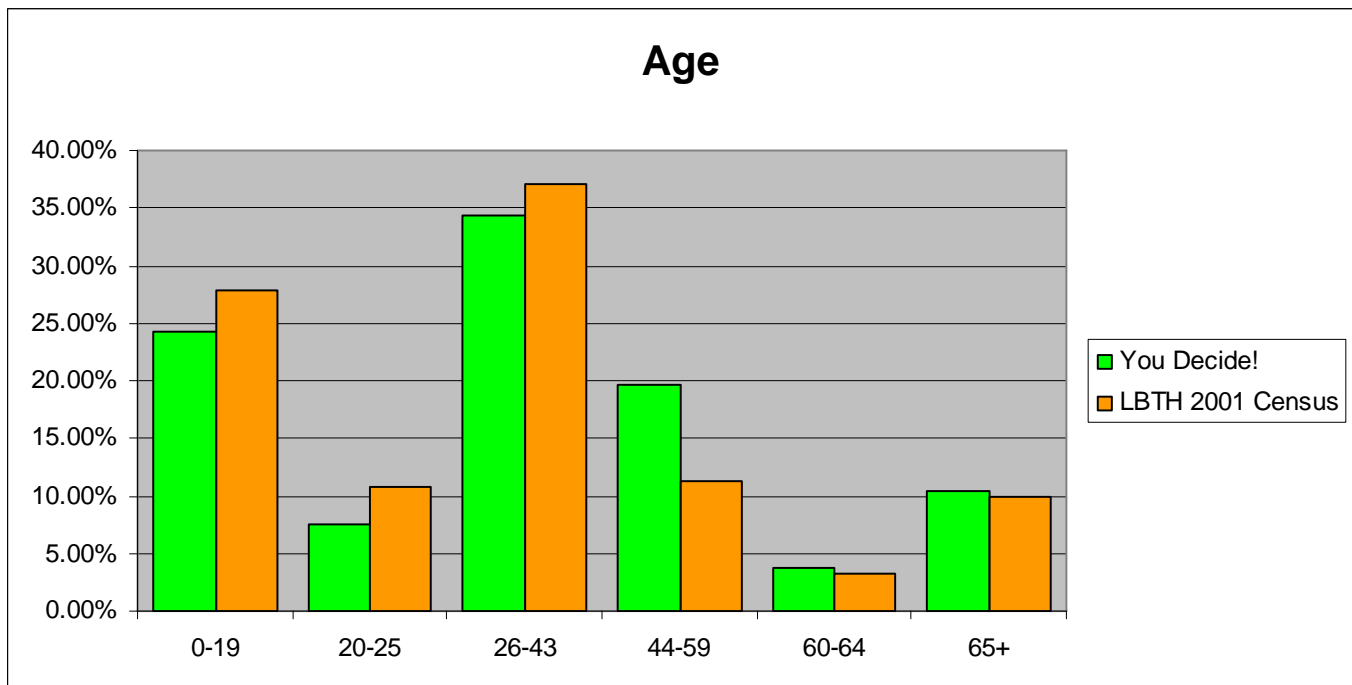
Equalities: Reflecting One Tower Hamlets

It was very interesting. Good to see such a cross section of the community participate (LAP 8 resident)

As part of our commitment to One Tower Hamlets and to ensuring that all our consultation and engagement activities involve a good mix of people from within the community. All events and activities attempt to record equalities monitoring information. To try and increase the level of monitoring we asked participants to pre-register and complete a monitoring form as part of this. 540 of the 815 who attended the events had pre-registered and of the 540 about 300 gave a full set of equalities data. Thus the data set that follows is based on the information provided by those 300.

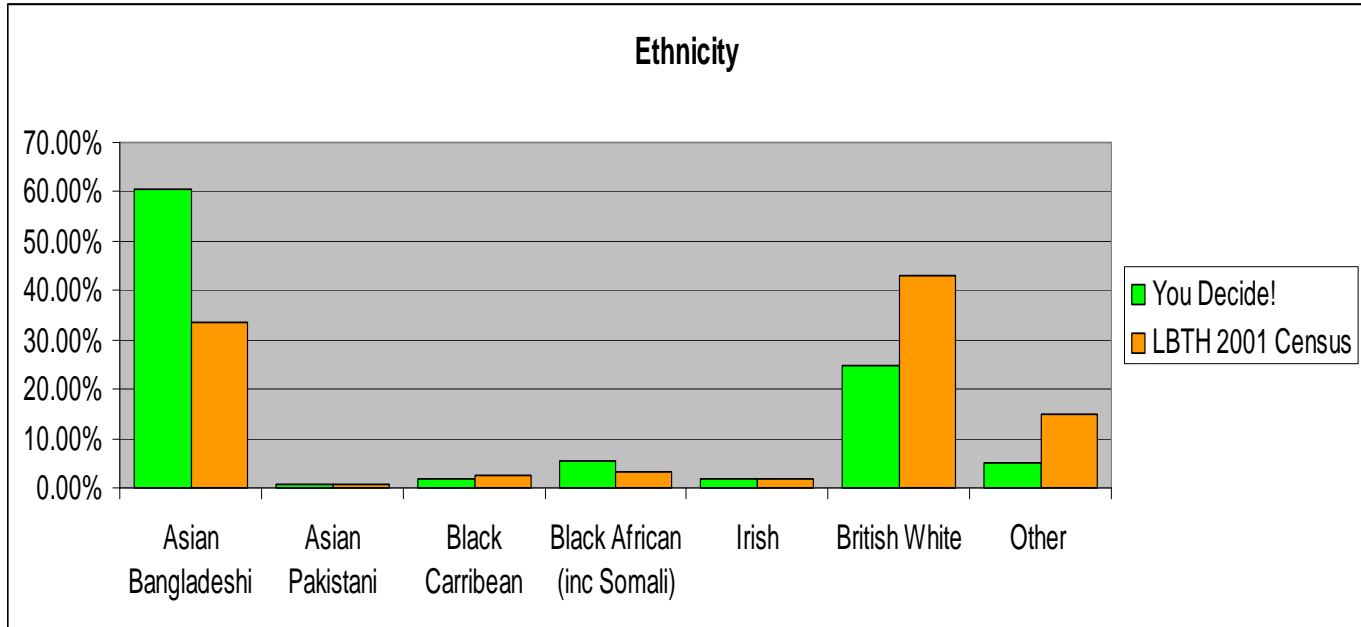
We then compared this data to the 2001 census information to provide a suitable comparator.

As you can see the census suggests that the age mix we were able to get to the events was more or less a match to that of the people in the borough. The one thing to note about these statistics is that the 0-19 age group from the census contains all those aged 0-19 whereas the group who attended the events only represent those ages 12-19. This might slightly distort the figures.

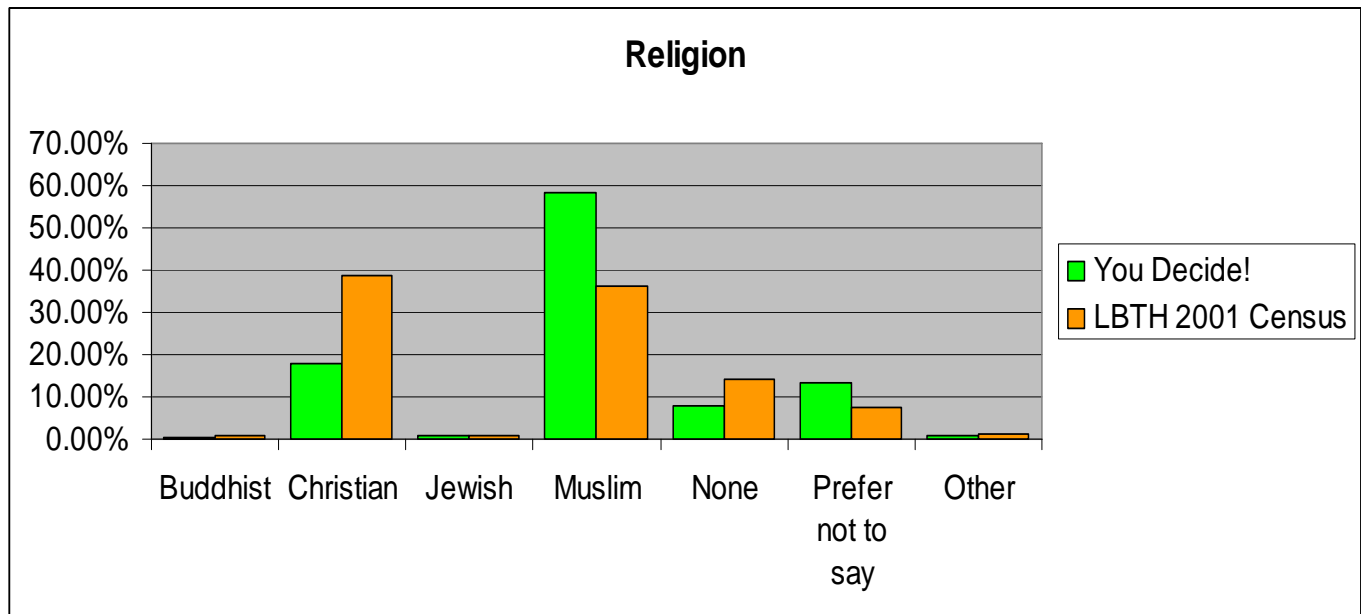


The 44-59 age group are slightly over-represented but otherwise the information suggests attendance by age reflected the borough profile.

In terms of ethnicity the chart below shows that across all the events the Asian Bangladeshi population were over-represented compared with the Borough's demographic profile. The White British community were under-represented.



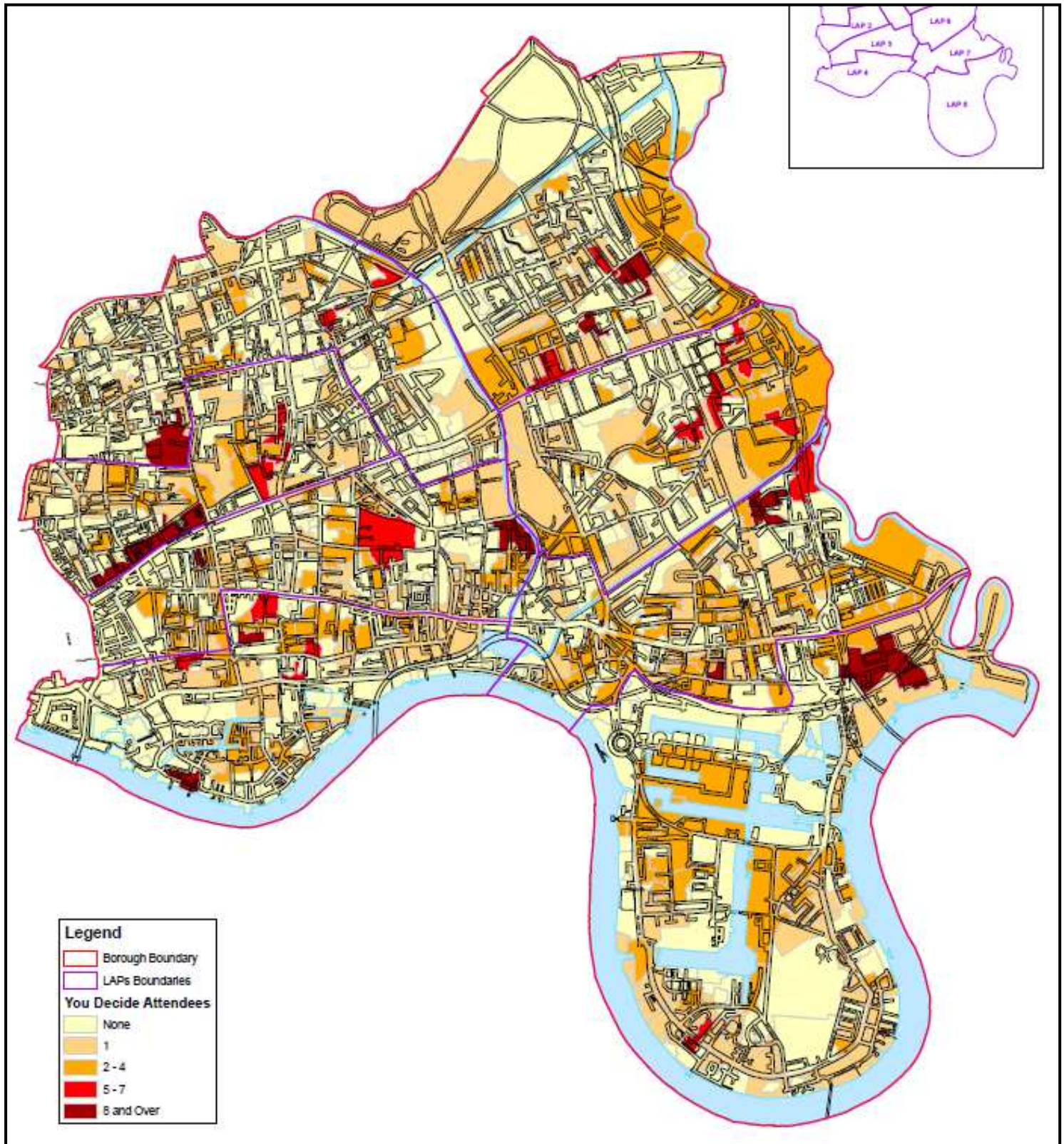
This differential is also reflected in the religion break down where we had more Muslims than average and less Christians. We also had slightly less people of 'no religion' than the average for the borough.



The final area we were able to measure was the geographical location of those who attended the event. On the next page we have produced a map which shows in graphical form the output area in which each of the residents who attended lived. In order to attend an event residents had to give their postcode so the map below is based on a much wider data set including nearly every resident who attended.

On the map below each postcode is plotted to a small output area and then the area is coloured based on the number of people from that area who attended. The map therefore provides a visual representation of who attended the events.

A map of You Decide! attendees from across Tower Hamlets



The map shows a good spread of individuals attending from across the Borough. There are a few areas of maroon and these represent high turnouts and a few areas of light yellow where there was no turnout.

This wide spread of turnout is good for two reasons. Firstly, it means we reached out to a wide range of people and groups ensuring that the outcome reflected the concerns of people from across the LAP. Secondly, it means that our communications campaign was by and large successful at reaching people across the borough.

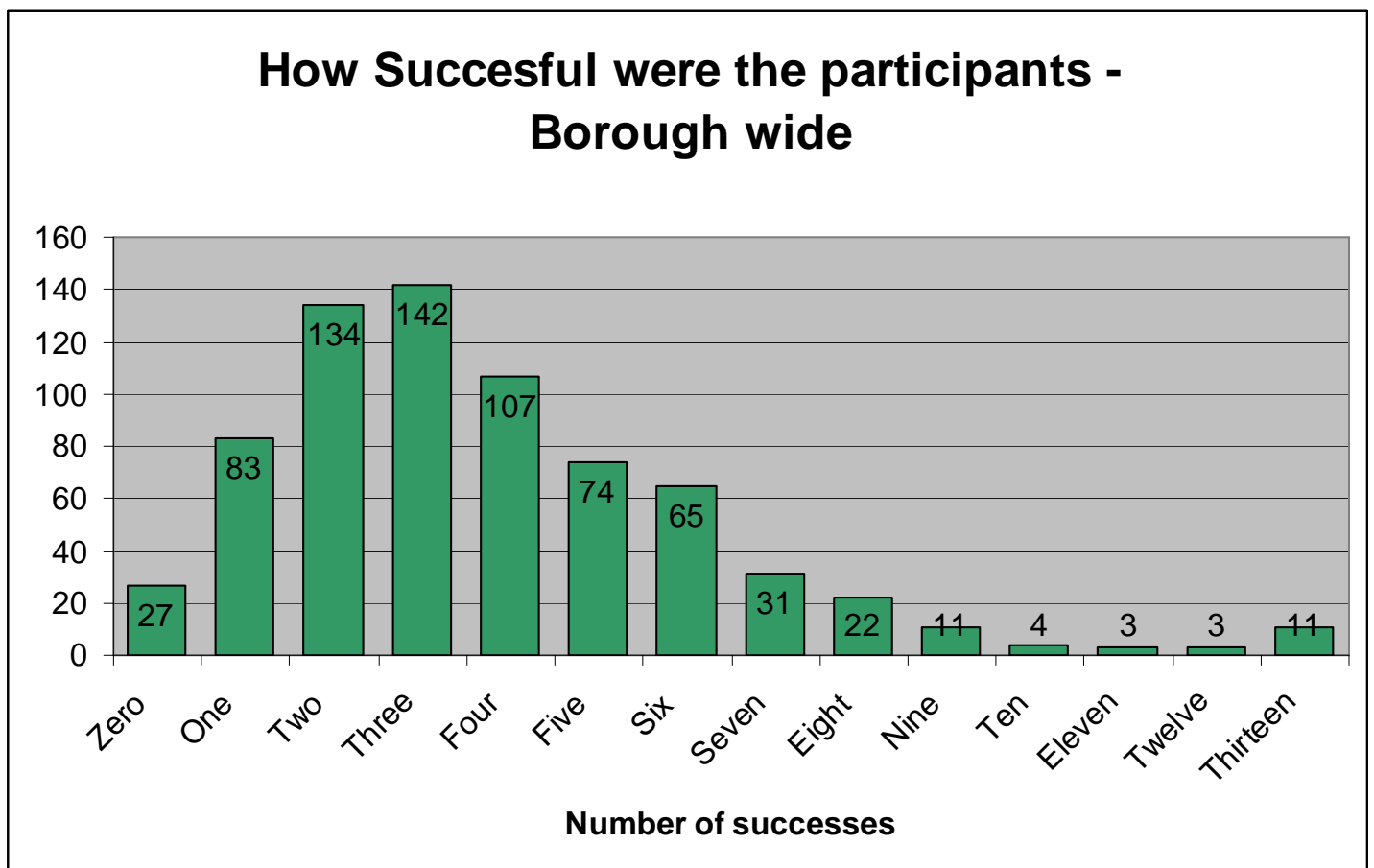
Who Decided?

*I had no idea we'd be allocating money in such a direct and immediate way
(LAP 8 resident)*

The Participatory Budgeting Unit has a saying which is: *'If people leave the event and feel they've made the decision, that's PB; if they leave and feel that they haven't then it isn't.'* In order to assess how many people had a direct say over the decisions made as part of this process we ran an analysis of the voting patterns.

The chart below shows how many times individual participants were 'successful' within the You Decide! voting process. For the purposes of this analysis a 'success' is when someone votes for an item that is then purchased. A good event will have lots of people being 'successful' with a broad spread of 'successes'. Where we have a broad spread this is emblematic of what has been termed 'shifting coalitions' where different groups of people vote together at different times to secure different 'items'.

The following chart shows a good mix of 'success rates':



The results are very positive. The spread of success was fairly even across the borough with nearly everyone successful at least once and the majority achieving a success in at least three of the votes. With roughly ten items purchased in each event this represents a good spread.

This picture was reflected across all the LAPs except LAP 2 which had a slightly less even spread.

Overall, the evidence from the voting patterns suggests a good spread of 'successes' with nearly all people who attended having a role in 'deciding' where the money was spent. It also reflects 'shifting coalitions' of votes meaning that no group was able to dominate.

A commentary

'It is very interesting to be present today and for the residents to take part in the project. I hope this will be implemented and that such a meeting will continue to take place' (LAP 2 resident)

What follows is a commentary based on the feedback we have received from staff, residents and others involved in the process. It is split into two sections:

- Strengths
- Weaknesses

Within each area it will then look at the issues that seemed to have raised the most controversy. The observations are key learning points to inform future PB work.

Strengths:

Duty to Inform, Consult and Involve

The 'Duty to Involve' came into force on the 1st April 2009. This new duty seeks to ensure that local people have greater opportunities to have their say and will form the backbone of the community involvement strategies of local authorities over the next few years.

The PB process contributes to all three of these aims:

- Residents are informed about both the cost of items but also the actual services that already exist. They also get an understanding of the budget process and as one staff member pointed out: *'It helps the public understand the Member's role.'*

'I personally think that everyone has learnt a lot of ways of how to spend money on useful resources and having one of these every year will help more and more people to come along and participate.' (Resident: LAP 8)

- People were consulted with and involved in taking the decisions.

'It was a very enjoyable experience and I feel more involved in decisions being made about my local area and in my local community' (Resident: LAP 4)

Practicalities

The following comments reflect elements of the practicalities that were successful. Some of these issues will be included in both the strengths and weaknesses section:

Voting: Those who felt that the voting was positive praised it for the openness and transparency of the process:

'The voting system is slick, effective and gives really quick feedback. People actually cheered!'
(LAP 8 resident)

Youth: The involvement and engagement of the young people in this project has been praised by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Participatory Budgeting Unit (PB Unit).

As one participant from LAP 2 said:

'It is comforting to see the confidence of the young people'

Involvement of Services: Part of this process is about improving the linkages between the services and the public they serve. This is achieved by making the public more aware of the services; for example both Jamie Blake (Public Realm) and Andy Bamber (Community Safety) were able to make some comment as to the services they currently provide as part of their presentations. Also, it will be locked in during the process of negotiation undertaken between the services and the Steering Groups. This process will hopefully help the services form a closer relationship with the public and also build on the local knowledge they already have.

Administration: The facilitators felt that the event was well organised and planned. There are some small areas where improvements can be made (fitting in prayer times at the LMC) but in general the smoothness of the events was a credit to the work of the team.

Vibrancy: The events were different to other consultation events in that there was real money to be spent. The voting process therefore generated some real excitement and in more than one event there was cheering, clapping and a general buzz around the room.

A staff member described it as: '*very vibrant*' and a resident from LAP 3 described it as a '*Very lively event*'.

Weaknesses

'I strongly agree with the day and the principle but strongly disagree that the voting method was appropriate.' (LAP 5 resident)

It is fair to say that those who were disappointed with the event were the most vociferous in their denunciation of it. Whilst I have only chosen short quotes they are indicative of a sizable minority who had real concerns.

Young people: The concerns about young people came in three categories:

- They don't pay council tax and therefore shouldn't be able to vote

'The young people there don't have an electoral vote or pay taxes and while it was good to see them there, there they should not have been allowed to decide on such funding options.' (LAP 1 resident)

- They voted in bloc and didn't really understand the local priorities

'As there were a very large amount of young people present they voted for their priorities. Although this was commendable I feel it was too heavily weighted and some consideration should therefore be given to higher priority for other pressing issues i.e. crime/drug operations that affect everyone!' (LAP 3 resident)

- The young people were disruptive and 'spoiled' the event.

'Hard, noisy and young people dominated the evening; some behaving very poorly.' (LAP 2 resident)

There are alternative views. Young people make up a large proportion of the Tower Hamlets population and should have a say over which services are provided locally; especially as they are a major user of those services.

On the second point it is clear to us that in events where the young people were split up and asked to sit on tables with others the concern were reduced. In events where they sat on their own in groups

this was a larger problem. One suggestion to improve this going forward is to have 'assigned seating'. Another key recommendation is that we do some pre-work with the young people before the event.

The final point depends on people's description of 'disruptive'. Young people were more boisterous but the events overall were quite lively at times and as long as this is managed properly going forward it should not be a problem next year.

There was also concern about the presence of youth workers. It is clear that for the next set of events we will need in the words of one of the facilitators: *'A clear policy on conflict of interest before we do this again'*.

Some residents disagreed strongly about the presence of young people and some work will have to be done to rebuild trust before next year.

Voting system: Concerns about the voting system took two forms:

- Those who were concerned that this process relied more on strategy than individual preference due to the multiple votes and ability to change priorities as the process developed *'The voting method is not fair. Voting should not be based on strategy.'* (LAP 4 resident)
- Those who were concerned that the voting system didn't allow them to reflect preferences; this meant that if their first choice was never purchased they never had the opportunity to express their second and third preferences. In contrast those who were successful with the first few preferences often got to express fourth, fifth and sixth preferences.

'Use of a different, proportional, system of voting would allow a wider range of participants to have a stake in the allocation of the budget and would prevent the dominance of a large well organised group.' (LAP 2 Steering Group Co-Chair)

'I feel that the voting should have captured a single majority for each item and then used the majority priority approach if there was an incomplete fit between votes and available expenditure' (LAP 5 resident)

The money should have been split 80, 80, 80 and then people choose for within the areas. (LAP 8 resident)

We will need to look closely at the voting system and develop a new system, in conjunction with residents and councillors before the next event.

Menus: The two concerns about the menus concerned items that were missing and the fact that they were grouped in 'silos' under generic service headings.

We will need to make the menu design process more inclusive and offer greater options for people.

Logistics; venues and food: Concerns under this category include:

- There was not enough food at some of the events and in particular at LAP 2 and 3 where the food was also very bad

'Not enough food and VERY bad catering' LAP 2 resident

- The catering at LAP 8 (Docklands Sailing Centre) was very expensive

- The venue in LAP 2 was criticised. Residents felt that using a venue such as the Brady centre would have been more appropriate. Also the venue in LAP 7 had dreadful acoustics which hampered the enjoyment of the event for many.

We should ensure that where possible the venues and caterers we use have been tried before and approved to be suitable.

Publicity before the event: Although we were able to attract 815 people to the events and register almost the same amount again who did not attend there was a feeling that the advertising of the event was not wide enough and that people were therefore excluded. This concern was reflected in most of the LAPs.

Not enough cross section of the Island. Why not leaflet each house? (LAP 8 resident)

The attending voters did not provide demographic representation. EVERY council tax payer should get a vote. This is very important event was completely un-advertised (LAP 7 resident)

Advertising the event needs improving (LAP 6 resident)

We invested heavily in communicating about this event. By widening the process we should be able to 'get the word out' in advance. However, special attention needs to be paid to the amount of people who hear about the event.

Representation: This has been addressed above but some residents felt that the attendance at the event did not reflect their community. This was particularly the case in LAP 4 where there was a feeling that too many people came from Shadwell and LAP 8 where there was a feeling that the Island was not properly represented.

The performance in terms of representation was fairly good this year. However, One Tower Hamlets is absolutely central to everything we do and it is crucial that we continue to work hard over the next year to ensure that the events we hold represent the full community who we are asking to take part.

Other concerns included:

- The provision of Early GCSE in Mother Tongue caused some controversy as it was a service only available to a minority. However, it was very popular (purchased at 7 events)
- Some felt that including only the people in the room was unfair and that the only way to conduct the process was to hold a more general election, possibly with polling booths and universal suffrage. Others were concerned that had they been busy that night they would have been excluded.
- The service presentations were considered by some to be too long and uninspiring. Others considered that there was not enough factual information given so that rational decisions could be made.
- Some felt the money on offer was too low
- Others felt that the LAP was too large an area and that we should have had one event per ward.

We need to ensure that we seek to address all of these smaller concerns as even small things can make a big difference when it comes to community engagement. Particularly, we need to improve the 'inform' section of the event so that the residents feel that the service presentations are helpful and informative.

Conclusion

*“Tonight has been a fantastic opportunity for local residents to get involved, and by the numbers that have showed-up. It’s clear they want to have their say.”
(Cllr Ohid Ahmed, Lead Member for Regeneration, Localisation & Community Partnerships Mar 2009)*

The You Decide! events that this document analyses, and indeed the evaluation document itself, are not the end of the story. On the contrary this is just the initial stage of the process.

As the Steering Groups get involved in service delivery and as residents become aware of projects in their area that have been funded through this process we hope to be able to report greater engagement with the public and services even more reflexive to public preferences/needs.

However, the events do represent the focal point of the process and are therefore very important to get right. Whilst this evaluation has highlighted many areas where the event went well it has also identified significant areas that need to be improved in advance of next year’s event.

You Decide! is an innovative project that has received national recognition and praise. It has the potential to engage residents in a deeper way that we have been able before and help us meet some of the obligations included within the ‘Communities in Control’ White Paper.

Acknowledgments

This project involved the hard work and commitment of a large number of people. This included the project team who worked tirelessly to design and then put on the event; the neighbourhood management team who ensured that each event had local buy in used their local networks to drive a large part of the recruitment; the service heads who presented at each of the events; the facilitators who worked evenings and weekends to ensure good quality deliberation at all of the events; the councillors who supported the events, both locally and at the corporate level; the LAP Steering who will drive forward aspects of the services delivery and most of all the large numbers of residents who turned up to have their say.