

Acorns Participatory Budgeting Pilot

An evaluation

Sean Brennan

2009

Foreword

I am delighted to be able to present to you this evaluation of the Acorns Participatory Budgeting pilot. The success of this initiative has been nationally celebrated, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the organisers and the residents who participated so enthusiastically and for their efforts to achieve a better sense of community and engagement with local people. Acorns Neighbourhood Management was the first Participatory Budgeting initiative in North Lincolnshire and commendably achieved the highest proportionate level of engagement with over 800 residents, more than any other Participatory Budgeting initiative in the UK to date. It is important to acknowledge that the time constraints placed on this initiative proved problematic in some aspects and that the level of engagement would have been higher if these constraints had not been there. As a final thought I would like to suggest that this evaluation will give us guidance for future PB schemes in North Lincolnshire, building on the successes experienced at Acorns.



Cllr Susan Armitage

Chair of Acorns Participatory Budgeting Steering Group

Mayor of North Lincolnshire Council

Introduction

Acorns Neighbourhood Management is an initiative of North Lincolnshire Strategic Partnership. The Acorns area covers the Manor Farm, Riddings and Westcliff areas of Scunthorpe.

Participatory budgeting (PB) is part of the government drive for greater involvement in community decision making and the Department for Communities and Local Government have suggested that PB could assist local authorities with their Duty to Involve, which came into force in April 2009. PB involves local people in making decisions on the spending and priorities for a defined public budget. If done properly, it should engage local people and community groups in discussing, voting and ultimately deciding spending priorities and proposals. It is not merely a consultative exercise.

Policy, Funding and PB Processes

There are broadly 4 models of PB:

1. Spending parts of specific grant pots
2. Council budgets devolved to local area committees
3. Annual budget consultation
4. LAA spending priorities

The governments Participatory Budgeting Unit details the models in relation to the funds that they might most appropriately use:

Enabling Policy Framework	Source of Funding	PB Process Models			
		1	2	3	4
Strong and Prosperous Communities	Neighbourhood Renewal Funds	✓			
An Action Plan for Community Empowerment	Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders	✓			
Local Government & Public Information in Health Act 2007	Investment for LA mainstream budgets		✓	✓	
Local Government Act 2003	Overall council budget			✓	
Review of Policing by Sir Ronnie Flanagan	Neighbourhood policing budgets	✓	✓		✓
Our NHS, Our Future Operating Framework for 2008/09 LGPIH Act 2007	PCT budget	✓			
Youth Matters Green Paper	Youth Opportunity Fund, Youth Capital Fund	✓			
	Local Area Agreement budget	✓			✓
	Community Council Budgets	✓	✓		

Acorns' pilot was model 1.

There is a distinction between processes that use participatory methods, such as consultations on budget priorities, and actual PB processes. PB processes have all of the following characteristics:

1. Open and wide participation – seeking to involve those who would not otherwise be involved in budget decisions.
2. True decision-making – their decisions are implemented rather than being consultative in nature.
3. Deliberation and engagement – participants engage with the budget process in ways that succeed in gaining a degree of community responsibility and ownership over budget decisions as well as understanding the potential trade-offs that are involved.

Your Voice – Your Choice

The Home Office selected the Acorns PB scheme as one of only 26 areas in the country, and the only one in the Humber region. There was a pot of £20,000 to be distributed to residents' projects. Ten projects were shortlisted and put to a public vote, with the four projects receiving the most votes being delivered. The PB pilot scheme was called *Your Voice Your Choice* and contributes to North Lincolnshire's shared ambitions, particularly "everyone working together for the benefit of the area".

Process

June 2008	Home Office Green Paper “
September 2008	Launch of National Participatory Budgeting Strategy
October 2008	Acorns Neighbourhood Management presentation to Wider LSP Partnership
December 2008	Home Office invite bids for £20,000 to conduct a PB pilot
5 th January 2009 31 st January 2009	Acorns NM submit bid via Humberside Police Acorns notified that bid is successful - £20,000 must be committed by 31 st March 2009
10 th February 2009 12 th February 2009	PB Steering Group formed with Cllr Sue Armitage as Chair Advice sought from VANL on meeting the Compact obligations and invitation to bid circulated
27 th February 2009	Shortlisting Panel sifts proposals against criteria
11 th March 2009 17 th March 2009 18 th March 2009 30 th March 2009	Elected Members' Briefing Acorns Your Voice – Your Choice Launch Event Newsletter and Ballot Papers mailed out to all households in Acorns area Voting closes, results announced at Acorns AGM
April 2009	Successful proposals sponsors plan “Action Week” for May 26 th to 30 th (half term)
18 th May 2009 26 th -30 th May 2009	'Results Special' Acorns Newsletter delivered to all Acorns households, detailing successful projects and Action Week Action Week
25 th June 2009	Acorns PB Your Voice – Your Choice evaluation report published

As soon as it was announced that the Acorns PB Pilot bid had been successful, the team established a PB Steering Group to oversee the process. Cllr Sue Armitage; a ward

member for the target area chaired the group of officers from Humberside Police, North Lincolnshire Homes and North Lincolnshire Council, NHS North Lincolnshire and voluntary sector and resident representatives.

The Steering Group agreed its Terms of Reference and set about developing a work programme to deliver the pilot:

- Community Safety priorities for the area were identified which met Policing priorities and those of residents - gleaned from previous consultation work
- A proposal application form was developed and circulated to statutory and third sector organisations who were invited to put forward proposals costing £5,000 that would meet the identified priorities
- Acorns staff received proposals and worked with sponsors to refine them. Of the 16 proposals received within the deadline, two projects agreed to work together to provide a stronger bid
- A shortlisting panel was established to identify the ten strongest proposals which met the criteria and which could be put to a public vote
- The March edition of the Acorns newsletter was dedicated to promoting the PB Pilot, detailing each of the ten proposals and the voting process. These were mailed with freepost ballot papers to each household in the target area.
- Acorns staff conducted nearly 40 “consultation station” events during the voting period to encourage and enable residents to use their vote
- Democratic Services undertook the counting of ballot papers and announced the four most popular proposals
- The May edition of the Acorns Newsletter was dedicated to detailing the successful projects and informing residents of the “Action Week” when the projects would be delivered
- A survey of residents’ views on the PB process was undertaken during the “Action Week”

The numbers involved in the process

The Acorns officers were not starting with a large network of people who they engage with on a regular basis. From a total population of over 10,000 people and 4,500 homes, the Acorns officers have engaged directly with just under 300 residents (however, all residents have received a quarterly newsletter from Acorns throughout the duration of the Neighbourhood Management (NM) programme). With this in mind, the Acorns officers knew there would be a significant amount of new engagement to be undertaken. If the

team were to reach all residents as opposed 'the usual suspects', this would have to be creative and fresh engagement.

Acorns used a postal vote (ballot distributed to 4,993 properties, this included commercial and third sector organisations), but did not solely rely on this. By asking Acorns residents to choose four proposals from ten, residents had to weigh up the pros and cons for each choice, in effect being asked to undertake an intelligent decision-making process.

845 people voted for their preferred PB projects. The numbers cast were not simply a result of sending out postal ballots and requesting they were completed and returned. Rather, the four Acorns officers 'took to the streets' and held a number of events around the area where people could meet and discuss the proposals. There was also a significant amount of door-knocking and engaging with residents. The Acorns officers researched the busy periods for shops and then ensured they had a presence in these locations during these times. In total, they held 37 events in 12 days, including weekends and evenings.

The Acorns officers went through the choices with residents and talked through any issues they had, all the while stressing that the £20,000 was *their* money. Knowing the low rate of turn-out to public events and the low response rate to written material, the Acorns staff recognised the need to actively promote the pilot. If they had relied exclusively on the postal vote mechanism:

- Turnout would have been lower
- The Acorns team would not have known whether people were actively considering what to spend the money on. Through engaging with local residents, Acorns officers witnessed an intelligent, measured approach to their decisions on preferred projects.

Engaging marginalised groups

The Acorns team, by holding consultation events at a variety of places, were able to meet with a range of people from marginalised, 'hard to reach' groups who do not traditionally engage with public agencies. This included speaking to young mothers at places they meet, and talking to people with addiction issues who were visiting the pharmacy at Westcliff Co-op.

The team recognised a further traditionally disengaged section of the community as males aged 25 – 60. These residents were engaged by the Acorns team entering into environments where this target audience would be, such as local public houses. The Acorns team talked through the options with residents, assisting them to fill in their ballot papers where necessary. This form of engagement often brought telling responses: "I like that anti-social behaviour one – that might have helped us 'cos we've just been evicted for ASB (young couple, Westcliff Precinct).

The Acorns officers held events close to the post office, which enabled them to speak with people collecting their benefits. People who were unlikely to be on the electoral register

were also persuaded to vote in the pilot: “I’ll have a vote, but I’m not giving my name and address – I’m wanted by the police” (young man in the Beacon public house). Whilst many initially refused and stated that they never vote, the Acorns officers explained that this project was about helping *their* community: “I don’t vote usually, I think it is a waste of time – but this is ok – if it really happens” (young mother, Westcliff Co-op).

How were Elected Members involved in the process?

The Acorns team were conscious of the potential for this type of participatory democracy to be perceived as conflicting with existing mechanisms of representative democracy. Briefings were carried out for elected members from the Brumby and Kingsway with Lincoln Gardens wards, and the project was discussed with the leader of the council. The Participatory Budgeting Steering Group is chaired by an elected member; Cllr Susan Armitage, ward member for the area, and approval to go ahead was agreed by the Acorns Neighbourhood Management Board which has three ward members for the area on it. Both the portfolio holders for Children’s and Adult Services attended the launch event for the Acorns PB pilot. Cllr Sue Armitage took a pro-active role in guiding and supporting the pilot, providing many opportunities for promoting and publicising the process.

Which were the successful options and how were they chosen?

1. North Lincolnshire Homes – Neighbourhood Clean-up (528 votes)

This option gained the most votes; the project proposal was to carry out an environmental clean-up week, supplying skips in key locations across the Acorns area for residents to use and involving young people in leading community litter picks.

This proposal could have been seen as a ‘quick win’ with little long-term impact on Community Safety. However, it was identified as a very important issue for local people, as many Acorns residents do not have access to waste disposal or recycling centres. This area is one of low car ownership, with many single and young parent households who do not have access to a car. There are also a high number of dwellings with communal doors and several flights of stairs to negotiate, or where access by vehicles is severely limited (including waste collection vehicles, removal vans etc). The popularity of the proposal also reflected that people feel safer when their environment is improved and that they are concerned about the visual appearance of their neighbourhood.

Links to National Indicators:

NI 195 – Improved street and environmental cleanliness - fly-tipping

NI 196 – Improved street and environmental cleanliness – levels of graffiti, litter, detritus and fly-posting.

Both these indicators are included in the North Lincolnshire Local Area Agreement

2. Humberside Police – Door Alarms (447 votes)

This project proposed purchasing 1,110 door alarms, which emit an audible warning when the door is opened, to alert the occupant to a possible intruder. This initiative promotes home security and encourages householders to keep their doors locked at all times. This project was popular in light of the 67% increase in sneak-in burglaries between 2007 and 2008. Initially this proposal planned to provide the most vulnerable households (1 in 4 homes) across Acorns with a door alarm. However, during the ballot process the police negotiated a reduced price and were able to purchase 4,000 alarms - enough for all residents who wanted one. This was not publicised until after the vote, demonstrating that residents were happy to vote for a project that would not necessarily benefit them personally.

Links to National Indicators:

NI 6 – Serious acquisitive crime (PSA23)

This indicator is included in the North Lincolnshire Local Area Agreement

3. Humberside Fire and Rescue – Home Fire Safety Equipment (351 votes)

This proposal aimed to provide kitchen timers, deep fat fryers and multi-plug extension leads to residents identified as at risk – particularly elderly and vulnerable people; this aspect was seen as particularly important as 70% of accidental fires are cooking related. It also proposed fitting wheelie bin locks to bins where there is a risk of nuisance arson, and fit smoke alarms to vulnerable residents' homes. Again this was a project that was promoted as one in which only the most vulnerable would benefit, further demonstrating residents' concerns for those most in need. The Fire and Rescue Service were subsequently also able to acquire a number of "Power Down" devices, which when fitted allow TV and other electrical items to be switched off by the TV remote control, without switching off DVD players and digital TV systems which need to remain on, thus saving energy and providing additional safety.

Links to National Indicators:

NI 33 Arson incidents

NI 49 No. primary fires and related fatalities and non-fatal casualties excluding precautionary checks

These indicators ARE NOT included in the North Lincolnshire Local Area Agreement

4. Westcliff Drop-in Centre – Youth Activities (302 votes)

This proposal aimed to provide a diversionary moto-bike project during the summer holidays for young people. It also aimed to provide awareness and prevention workshops on self defence and confidence building.

Links to National Indicators:

NI 110 – Young people’s participation in positive activities

NI 121 – Dealing with local concerns about anti-social behaviour and crime by the local council and police (PSA 23)

Both these indicators are included in the North Lincolnshire Local Area Agreement

As well as the individual projects’ links to national indicators, all of the projects link to the following national indicators:

NI 2 – Percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood (PSA 21)

NI 3 – Civic participation in the local area (PSA 15)

NI 4 – Percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality (PSA 21)

NI 5 – Overall/general satisfaction with the local area

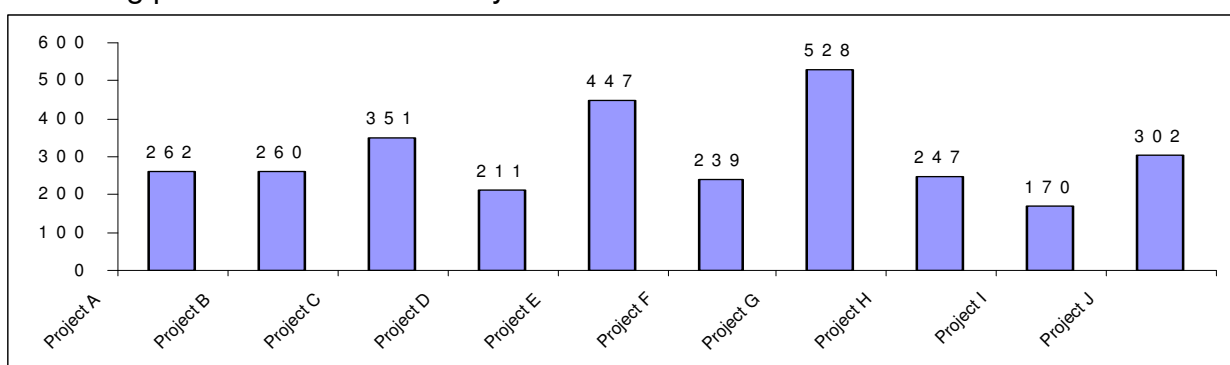
All these indicators are included in the North Lincolnshire Local Area Agreement

Voting patterns

The overall voting results were as follows:

Ref	Project	Sponsor	Votes	Rank
Project A	Fairplay Football	North Lincolnshire Fairplay Football	262	5 th
Project B	Mixed Junior Football	Scunthorpe United Community Sport & Education	260	6 th
Project C	Fire Prevention	Humberside Fire & Rescue Service	351	3 rd
Project D	Cycle Safety	Humberside Police Acorns Neighbourhood Policing Team	211	9 th
Project E	Door Alarms	Humberside Police Acorns Neighbourhood Policing Team	447	2 nd
Project F	ASBO Turnaround	New Westcliff Residents Association	239	8 th
Project G	Neighbourhood Clean Up	North Lincolnshire Homes	528	1 st
Project H	Young & Old Together	Riddings Action Group	247	7 th
Project I	Scunthorpe Sea Cadets	Scunthorpe Sea Cadets	170	10 th
Project J	Youth Activities	Westcliff Drop In Centre	302	4 th

The voting patterns are more clearly demonstrated in the chart below:



Had the process relied solely on the postal ballot results it would have been tempting to ascertain the following from these results:

- People have voted for established public sector organisations with a proven track record in community safety.
- People have voted selfishly for projects that will benefit them and their families
- People were significantly motivated to participate by the incentive of being entered into a free prize draw to win £100 in shopping vouchers

Whilst this may be true to an extent the conversations the Acorns team had with residents indicated otherwise. For example, the fire safety and door alarms proposals were popular with younger residents who talked about their recognition of the need to look after elderly people. It surprised the Acorns team as they heard young people arguing for a project to benefit older people, such as “I’m voting for things to help the old people, not enough is done for them round here”. The converse was true with older people vocal in recognising the need for youth activities, as several older residents commented “we need more things for the youngsters, they don’t have anything to do.”

When canvassing at the consultation events staff noted that the prize draw was not a major talking point and that people wanted to take part regardless of this. In the post PB survey of residents who took part, only 5% said that the draw was the main reason for participating, whereas 95% voted because they felt it was important or because it affected where they live. 15% clarified this by stating that they wanted to have their say.

Time constraints

The Acorns PB pilot has worked to extremely tight time constraints, which impacted on the organisation, reach and success of the process. This must be acknowledged in any evaluation. The Acorns manager has stated throughout that, had they had more time, they would have reached a far wider audience and approached the process rather differently. It must be stressed that these time constraints were created by the Home Office, as they would not allow flexibility from their deadlines.

Conversely, for residents the timescales have been beneficial, in that they have been asked how they want the money allocated in March 2009 and their decisions were carried out six weeks later, unlike other engagement processes where residents’ views are not acted upon until many months or years later, if at all. Only 15% of residents surveyed said they should have had more time.

The Acorns team were informed on 30th January 2009 by the Home Office that their application was successful. A PB Steering Group was then established in early February. This Steering Group comprised representation from North Lincolnshire Strategic Partnership, North Lincolnshire Council, Acorns Neighbourhood Management, Humberside Police, NHS North Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire Homes.

This Steering Group is ongoing and will continue to monitor the pilot until completion of delivery. A Partners Group was established by the four successful bids, and the four projects delivered over one week of the half-term break, commencing 26th May 2009. There has been an integrated approach to the delivery of the projects. The successful groups all have similar priority areas – fly-tipping, sneak-in burglaries and community clean-ups all relate to community safety so lend themselves to an overlap in delivery. Further community engagement was facilitated by bringing groups together when the skips were in place for the clean-up project, with intergenerational dialogue as older age residents brought their recycling to the skips alongside younger residents, and young people conducted litter-picks and helped older residents with lifting and carrying.

The Acorns team closed the consultation loop by publishing a newsletter to communicate how money had been allocated; this was published before the ‘week of action’. The team also carried out a feedback exercise to gain residents’ perceptions of the PB process. The officers spoke to people face to face, and gained direct feedback on the success of the exercise.

What would they do differently?

The Acorns NM team explained that they would, if possible, have had a longer voting period to allow a more comprehensive approach and reach a wider audience. A different time of year would also have been chosen, as January – March coincided with Acorns’ AGM and the approach of the end of the financial year; as a result the desired level of resources could not be committed to the pilot.

The PB pilot had only a 12 day voting period, from 18th – 30th March. Acorns would have chosen a full month voting period if it had been possible. They would still have used a postal ballot, but in conjunction with a wider period of engagement and active consultation. They would also have allowed for a longer period between the closing date of the voting period and the announcement of the successful projects, to allow for adequate counting time and allow any later votes cast to be counted. This was not possible this time, as the £20,000 had to be allocated by 31st March 2009, such were the strict timescales.

Invitations to bid were sent out in February. Invitees then had 10 days to devise a costed plan. Acorns NM acknowledged that it would have been preferable to have a longer timescale between this and the actual short-listing. 16 projects were initially submitted. These were integrated into 14 final submissions, as some of the groups decided to work together since their applications were similar. If there had been more time, even more groups could have been involved to produce more fully integrated submissions.

The principal contact lists used for invitations to bid were those of the Local Strategic Partnership and Voluntary Action North Lincolnshire (VANL), with more time a promotion campaign to encourage a wider range of proposals, could have been developed. The project sponsors could also have done more canvassing to generate interest in voters.

Due to the time constraints, Acorns NM team recognised that in some respects they missed out one step of a genuine PB process, namely that of establishing people's priorities. However, the Home Office criteria for using the funds was that activity had to address Policing priorities for the area. Acorns used the Policing priorities but also referred to the findings of the household survey and the extensive consultation with Acorns residents and stakeholders that took place during the development of the Acorns Neighbourhood Management Strategy during 2006-2007. However, had there been more time available, the team would have preferred to have carried out much more work establishing local priorities around community safety.

Exclusion of potential bids

NHS North Lincolnshire stated that they would have liked to submit a bid. However, they were unable to work to the strict timescales required of this bidding process, which also coincided with a period when a large number of people were taking annual leave, further weakening their ability to submit a bid in sufficient time.

Apna Sahara were involved in a PB project bid, supporting and feeding into Riddings Action Group's intergenerational application 'Young and Old Together'.

These instances detailed above serve to demonstrate that a major weakness of the Acorns PB pilot has been down to the narrow time-scale required in order to secure the Home Office funding. An acknowledgement of this is only fair but does not detract from the detrimental impact it has had on this particular pilot. The Acorns NM team, a small team of 4 officers, had to turn around the whole process in a matter of weeks and should be applauded for their efforts in doing so, arranging 37 polling events in 12 days for instance. Nonetheless, the effects of the time constraints, as analysed above, were significant, and include:

- Restricting the pool of applicants
- Weakening the bids received due to inadequate planning time
- Insufficient consultation time and limited establishment of priorities
- Lack of engagement with residents by the applicants
- Poor maximisation of potential to further integrate bids received
- Discounted late votes which could have been included with longer timescales
- No under 18s allowed to vote

Grant giving?

There was an initial fear that this community safety pilot could be interpreted as merely grant giving, as opposed to true budgeting. However, the budgeting occurred when people were asked to work through the pilot options, understanding that spending on one thing was to the exclusion of something else. This PB pilot met the criteria of:

1. Open and wide participation
2. True decision-making, and
3. Deliberation and engagement

Furthermore, this pilot could also have been used for the other forms of PB linking into more mainstreamed budgeting, as per the other forms of PB as highlighted in the introduction to this report.

Costs of the PB process

The PB pilot had £20,000 to spend. However, the Acorns team spent a considerable additional amount in administrating and publicising the pilot. Any measure of this PB process must set the costs of this against the £20,000 pilot fund. The project costs were considerable. The total materials costs are detailed below:

Pre-ballot publicity	
A5 colour flyers, A3 posters, stickers 1 tie on banner, 1 pop-up banner	
Cost:	£947.50
Newsletter & ballot	
Newsletter x 2 editions Printed return envelopes, ballot papers, collate & insert envelopes & ballot paper 2 nd class postage	
Cost:	£10,836.50
Total materials cost:	£11,784.00

For such a relatively small amount of funding being distributed, an outlay of nearly £12,000 is very large, comprising a figure over 58% of the PB pilot. A significant amount of this outlay is due to the costs associated with the postal ballot. However the Home Office, Department for Communities and Local Government and the Participatory Budgeting Unit have all commended the quality and reach of the Acorns PB Pilot publicity materials, and 70% of residents interviewed claimed to have found out about the PB Pilot through their quarterly Acorns Newsletter.

In this instance both newsletters were scheduled to be sent out by Acorns as part of their regular feedback to residents on what is happening. The costs of the two editions of the newsletter came to £8,638 therefore reducing the actual costs of the PB Pilot to **£3,146** plus staff time. A breakdown of hours spent is detailed over:

Planning:	4 hours
Preparation for PB Steering Group meetings:	4 hours
Attendance at PB Steering Group Meetings	14 hours
Developing the TOR:	3 hours
Preparation of Application Form and invitation to bid process:	6 hours
Preparation for and servicing short-listing panel:	4 hours
Developing Contract:	2 hours
Preparation and proofing of copy for newsletter and publicity:	8 hours
Launch event preparation and attendance:	10 hours
Attendance at Consultation Stations:	84 hours
Preparations for Action Week:	10 hours
Preparation of survey:	1 hour
Monitoring of Action Week and survey of residents views:	12 hours
Preparation of 2 nd Newsletter:	8 hours
Total Staff Time:	170 hours

The hours spent are high, and it is clear that a considerable amount of time was spent by officers driving this process in order to reach the deadlines. One possible option which could have reduced officer time would have been to tap into the extensive local voluntary network lists, using our partners in the voluntary sector, including VANL who maintain volunteer databases. This could have saved considerable PB time, as well as further embedding partnership working and spreading the message of PB. However, the tight timescales did not allow for the recruitment and training of volunteers at such short notice.

However, although the costs do appear high, when compared to the numbers involved in the other pilots sponsored by the Home Office, the costs are comparatively inexpensive. For example:

Pilot location	Budget allocated	Votes Cast	Cost per vote
Salisbury	£50,000	40	£1,250
Wiltshire	£50,000	40	£1,250
South Tyneside	£60,000	56	£1,071
Liverpool	£30,000	38	£789
Bolton	£40,000	77	£519
Slough	£20,000	40	£500
Norfolk	£26,000	60	£433
Barnsley	£30,000	80	£375
Barking & Dagenham	£30,000	94	£319
Fleetwood, Lancs	£20,000	70	£286
Rochdale	£20,000	80	£250
Islington	£28,000	136	£206
Blackburn with Darwen	£80,000	450	£178
Mansfield, Notts	£31,500	211	£149
North Lincolnshire	£20,000	845	£23

Source: *Participatory Budgeting Community Safety Pilots. May 2009, PB Unit*

The table demonstrates the comparative costs of the Acorns pilot. From all of the Home Office pilots, North Lincolnshire was the cheapest, and would have been even cheaper (in terms of cost per vote) had Acorns had more than £20,000 to distribute.

Further positives from the process

One of the primary intended outcomes of PB is to develop budget literacy in citizens. The Acorns NM team felt that the discussions they held with participants and voters throughout this process has contributed towards this, as people began to see the difficulty of prioritising: “It’s hard to pick isn’t it – can I vote for all of them!” (young couple, Riddings Co-op). All those involved in the process insisted that the process has markedly reinvigorated local democracy, as one team member explained:

“I spoke to people time and time again on the streets, in pubs and outside supermarkets, and people began to see what money could be spent on, and that it had a knock-on effect, meaning a vote for one meant another wouldn’t get funded – but also that it was *their* money. Many of the people I spoke to were rather shocked to start thinking of these things as theirs – their bids, their money, their community. I think this is where the value of PB lies.”

The Acorns NM team were pleased with the 17% turnout for the ballot, and pointed out that the proportionate response was far higher than requests to respond in the Council’s *Direct* publication, for instance. The Acorns team felt that the reason for the response rate was simple: if the issues matter to people they will vote, and are often pleased to even be asked in the first instance: “I like this, it’s a good idea. I think people should decide where money gets spent” (young mum, Westcliff Children’s Centre). Also, if the method of engagement enables people to participate in a way that suits them they are more likely to be involved.

The Acorns team felt the approach worked best when they talked through the options with people and impressed upon them that it was their money. However, with such a small team and strict timescales they could only reach a finite number of people before they literally ran out of time. Had they used a volunteer base, however, as suggested above, their reach would have been enhanced considerably, although volunteers would require adequate training and support, which in turn would have had to be incorporated into the work plan.

Unintended outcomes

This PB pilot also benefitted from producing several unintended outcomes, such as partnership working between agencies involved in delivering the projects during the week of action. There was considerable engagement by public agencies with residents in the lead up to and during this time, as PCSOs involved in the fitting of door alarms spoke with people about wider community safety issues, and were on hand to provide advice. This was a similar case for representatives from the fire service and North Lincolnshire Homes. This engagement should serve to help tackle people’s fear of crime, and could contribute to better performance in the national indicators related to perceptions.

i) North Lincolnshire Homes

Steve Evans, Head of Housing Management, said the clean up, which also saw young people getting involved in morning litter picks, extolled the virtues of teamwork and multi agency work. "The week was clearly a big success and the skips proved very popular...all our staff did a great job and it was fantastic that we could be involved in this multi agency work".

Several referrals were made to the HandyVan scheme. At least two entries for the North Lincolnshire Homes Garden Competition were completed. An enquiry was also made about possible job opportunities within NLH.

ii) Westcliff Drop-in

Westcliff Drop-in experienced a citizenship and volunteering spin off. They gained five new youngsters who signed up for Dreamscheme and have gone on to become active community volunteers and are ready for their next assignment.

iii) Police

The police reported positive feedback as residents were provided with the opportunity to provide crime intelligence. Some of the information provided directly led to the arrest of an individual for a serious offence.

One PCSO reported that a young mum was very grateful and relieved to have an alarm fitted as her small children were prone to running off and she could now hear when they tried to get out of the house.

PCSO s reported that they made dozens of referrals to the fire brigade for fire safety checks where appropriate.

Over 500 alarms were fitted during the week of action and the impact of this on crime statistics will be assessed over the summer period.

iv) Fire Service

An elderly male has been referred to sensory impairment for an assessment for a specialist smoke alarm for the deaf.

Several requests for door alarms were passed on to PCSOs.

Following a spate of malicious false alarms and complaints of ASB the fire service worked with North Lincolnshire Homes to resolve some of the issues. Since this initiative false alarm calls have ceased and at a recent Area Action Team meeting both agencies were congratulated for their actions and positive outcomes.

One vulnerable male adult was identified living in squalor. Agencies were contacted to address the situation.

Conclusion

This report demonstrates that the Acorns PB pilot has been a process operated within very strict time constraints that have seriously confined the scope and reach of the project for officers, but not for residents. The funding was confined to a set remit of priorities around community safety, and the time constraints effectively excluded the submission of some proposals. With more time, there could have been greater integration of the proposals submitted for projects, which could have created 'better' more joined-up bids creating a truly partnership approach.

The benefits of this pilot can also be measured more effectively by monitoring what impact they have on the national indicators they affect, when future NI results are published.

The costs of the project have also been high (though much would have been used for engagement activity in the area regardless), although once the evaluation of the other Home Office pilots has been completed, a truly comparative analysis of Acorns' efficiency can be carried out. Until this, several questions are worth considering:

- Did people genuinely identify this pilot exercise as participatory *budgeting*, as opposed to grant spending?
- Will there be follow-up exercises to investigate any issues?
- Have services/agencies been linked to people who may not have contact yet? [Unintended outcomes]
- What are the implications for further PB and community based management?
- Could this exercise be valid for the three further models of PB?

Acorns' PB pilot has already been lauded by the PB Unit for the numbers of people they engaged with, particularly from marginalised, traditionally hard to reach groups. They have managed to engage with the highest number of people from all of the Home Office pilots. These methods should be employed in further PB initiatives across North Lincolnshire, hopefully with the benefit of adopting the lessons to be learnt from this pathfinder pilot, along with benchmarking against various initiatives across the country, allied to close cooperation with the Participatory Budgeting Unit. PB, if done correctly, using the methods in this process and the lessons learned throughout, fits in with the national agenda for devolution, community empowerment and engagement, as well as, within North Lincolnshire, the embryonic community based management.

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