

TAKE500+

YOUR COMMUNITY, YOUR VOICE, YOUR CHOICE!

LEARNING AND EVALUATION REPORT SUMMARY

ARMAGH, BANBRIDGE & CRAIGAVON
COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERSHIP
NOVEMBER 2023



FOREWORD



Colette Rogers
Public Health Agency
Chair of the ABC Community
Planning Strategic
Partnership



Catherine McFarland
Northern Ireland Housing
Executive
Chair of the ABC Shared
Leadership & Community
Engagement Sub-Committee



Donna Stewart
Craigavon & Banbridge
Volunteer Bureau and
ABC Vice-Chair of the
Shared Leadership &
Community Engagement
Sub-Committee

“ We are delighted to present this Learning and Evaluation Report on our community planning partnership’s second Participatory Budgeting (PB) project. Tak£500+ has exceeded our expectations through the number of applications we received and the number of people who came to the events to vote. ”

We view PB as an essential part of our decision making in ABC – it is important to us that our community has the opportunity to contribute to making decisions that are meaningful to them and make a difference. We want children and young people to be involved. We were especially pleased that so many children voted for the projects they wanted to see in their area.

The report shows us that we achieved what we set out to do. Local people decided where investments were made to meet local needs. Countless community connections were made at the decision events and through the projects delivered across the borough. The Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing public health message was promoted and brought to life through the communications, the decision events and the projects.

The success of Tak£500+ is due to the commitment and expertise of local communities who put forward ideas and came to vote at the events. There is a rich community life in this borough and the project has shone a light on the countless volunteers and staff in the Community, Voluntary and Social Enterprise sectors who do important work in their communities. We thank you for the work that you do to promote the wellbeing of people in ABC and make the borough a great place to live.

We would also like to thank the community planning partnership’s PB Working Group who designed and implemented the project. It is a great example of partnership working across the community, voluntary and statutory sectors and we are proud of what the group has achieved. Partners have pooled their time, expertise, money and put decision making into the hands of local people who know best what is needed in their communities.

This report is also about making sure that we learn from Tak£500+ and that we carry that learning into any future PB processes. There are 31 recommendations in this report, devised from feedback from applicants, voters, partners and Elected Members. We are grateful to all those who gave their views and shared their experiences of Tak£500+. The Community Planning Strategic Partnership has endorsed the recommendations in the report and we are committed to building them into future PB processes.

The numbers who took part in Tak£500+ and the feedback we got through the evaluation show that there is a real appetite for Participatory Budgeting in ABC. To grow PB we need more partners to come on board to contribute their expertise and resources to the process and we hope that this report will help us to do this by communicating the impact and potential of PB, as well as the readiness and capacity of our partnership to deliver.

BACKGROUND

Latest figures show that only 19% of people in ABC feel they have an influence on decisions made in their neighbourhood¹. Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a way for people to get involved and directly vote on how local money is spent. ABC Community Planning Partnership is committed to PB as a way to deliver the community plan for the borough and Take500+ is its second PB project taken forward by the PB Working Group. The PB Working Group set the shared purpose for the project as:

- To empower communities and support a sense of ownership for investment and decision-making;
- To better meet needs, as defined by the local community;
- To strengthen partnership working;
- To promote innovation and community connections; and
- To promote the Take 5 public health message.

The survey of voters and successful groups shows overwhelming support for more PB in the borough. The partnership has undertaken this Learning and Evaluation Report to assess how the project met its shared purpose and the ambition in the partnership's Community Engagement Strategy and to capture learning for future PB processes. It also hopes to influence regional policy relating to PB and community planning.

TAK£500+ SHARED PURPOSE & IMPACT

The Learning and Evaluation Report found that Tak£500+ met its shared purpose. However, feedback from successful groups, voters and project partners was more positive than groups who were unsuccessful or withdrew before the decision events.

To empower communities and support a sense of ownership for investment and decision-making

3770 people from across the borough attended the decision-making events and voted to allocate £76,412 to 81 local projects which they wanted to see happen under the Take 5 public health message.

- Any three people aged eight and over could apply for money to bring the Take 5 public health message to life.
- 119 applications were received – 13% from non-constituted groups. All 119 applications were invited to attend the decision-making events.
- 3 decision making events were held showcasing 91 community projects.
- 90% (81) of projects represented at the events were funded through the community vote. There were 10 unsuccessful projects.
- Children and young people were able to vote along with adults. The largest age group of voters were those aged between 8 and 15 years old.
- Voters aged between 16-24 and 75+ were the least represented (5.6%).

Voters and community groups surveyed think it is important to have a say in how public money is allocated.

- 98% (508) of voters surveyed.
- 96% (53) of successful groups surveyed.
- 100% (7) of both unsuccessful groups and groups who withdrew before the decision-making events surveyed.

Successful community groups felt more empowered by having a voice in how resources are allocated and increased their energy and confidence as a group.

- 87% (48) felt more empowered by taking part in the decision-making events.
- 92% (51) agreed that attending the decision-making event had energised their group.
- 91% (50) increased their confidence as a group through the decision-making event.
- All groups increased their confidence through delivering their project and felt empowered by creating positive change in their community.



Lord Mayor Margaret Tinselly with members of the PB Working Group



Unsuccessful groups were less likely to agree that they were empowered by having a voice in how resources are allocated or that they increased their energy and confidence as a group.

- 57% (4) strongly disagreed that they felt more empowered, disagreed that attending the decision-making event had energised their group or had increased their confidence.
- 29% (2) strongly agreed that they felt more empowered, that attending the decision-making event had energised their group and that they had increased their confidence as a group.

Voters and Successful groups would like to see more PB happening across the Council area.

- 97% (37) of successful groups.
- 98% (510) of voters would vote again.

To better meet needs, as defined by the local community

81 community-led health and wellbeing projects delivered across the borough.

- 100% (38) of successful groups agreed that they had addressed needs in the community through their project delivery.
- 92% (51) of successful group respondents felt they were supported to access resources to address needs in the community.

"It gives the public the opportunity to have their say on what's needed and delivered."

"We were blown away by the turn out from the public at the event. It really goes to show that people do care about how finances are spent."

To promote innovation and community connections

Voters felt more involved in the community and more aware of what was happening in their area from attending the decision-making events.

- 94% (491) feel more involved in the community.
- 97% (506) feel more aware of what is happening.
- 78% of younger children surveyed at the events felt more involved in the community from attending.

Groups feel that they have raised awareness of their group and are more aware of what is happening in their area.

- 98% (54) of successful groups agreed they have raised awareness of their group.
- 95% (52) of successful groups are more aware of what is happening in their area.
- 69% of unsuccessful groups agreed they had raised awareness of their group.

¹Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (ARK) 2020-2022

Successful groups agreed they had created and strengthened connections.

- 95% (52) created new connections with other groups or individuals at the decision-making event and through delivery of their project.
- 91% strengthened connections with other groups or individuals at the decision-making event and all agreed they strengthened connections through their project delivery.
- 100% agreed that they created stronger connections with Council and service providers through being involved in Tak£500+.

Unsuccessful groups were less likely to feel that they had created and strengthened connections through participating in the decision-making events.

- 57% (4) created new connections with other groups or individuals.
- 57% (4) strengthened connections with other groups or individuals.
- 57% (4) disagreed that they created stronger connections with Council and service providers.

To strengthen partnership working

A key enabler of Tak£500+ was the strength, commitment and positive partnership working demonstrated by the PB Working Group.

- 29 partners from across seven thematic sectors.
- Eight partners pooled £91,700 for a PB Fund and financial administration. Council provided project management and running costs.
- All partners supported the planning and delivery of the process.
- The PB Working Group ranked themselves as Excellent under the Working Together Community Engagement Standard.
- 100% of PB Working Group respondents feel they are better equipped to plan future PB processes.

To promote the Take 5 public health message



Voters and successful groups are more aware of the Take 5 public health message as a result of taking part.

- 73% (384) of voters were more aware.
- 96% (53) of successful groups.

Unsuccessful groups were less likely to respond that they are more aware of the Take 5 public health message.

- A split response with 43% (3) more aware and 43% (3) not more aware of the message.

Over half of voters responded that they would incorporate the Take 5 message into their daily routine.

- 62% (322) of voters.

Successful groups felt that they had implemented the Take 5 public health message through delivery of their projects.

- 100% (38) agreed that they had improved mental and physical health and wellbeing.
- 84% (32) agreed that they had reduced loneliness.
- 92% (35) agreed that they had developed new skills themselves.
- 43% (35) of successful projects were sport or physical activity related.

TAK£500+ LEARNING FOR THE PARTNERSHIP & BEYOND

The report sets out 31 recommendations. It looks at what went well and what could be improved and includes recommendations for the PB Working Group for future grants processes, summarised below:

Project Design & Securing the Funding Pool

- PB Working Group to increase access and participation of underrepresented groups in the next process. Recruit youth champions to increase number of young people taking part.
- Explore opportunities for business to invest in PB.
- Make clearer to applicants what is involved in the decision events.

Decision Events

- Reduce the duration and provide more support to groups taking part.
- Further opportunities to promote the Take 5 message at the events.
- Explore hybrid voting (online and in person).

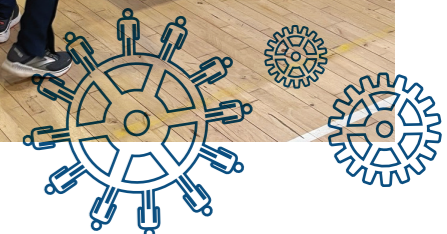
Project Delivery

- Allow a longer time period for groups to deliver their projects.
- Provide additional support to unsuccessful groups to make their idea happen a different way.
- A dedicated PB Support Officer is required to deliver the PB grants process.

The report found that the Tak£500+ project exemplifies what community planning was developed to achieve. It links regional and local priorities and partners were able to meet their own objectives around individual wellbeing and early intervention & prevention, while contributing to the realisation of long-term outcomes in the community plan. Whatever each partner contributed; they gained much more through leveraging their own resources against the combined contributions of all partners to the project.

The report also includes recommendations for the Community Planning Strategic Partnership on how it can support PB, for example:

- All community planning partners to incorporate PB into their business plans.
- Investment in a dedicated PB Support Officer.
- Seek buy-in from The Executive Office and Department for Communities to invest in PB to support delivery.
- Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to streamline arrangements for pooling budgets.
- Hold a Tak£500+ learning and impact event.
- The partnership should prioritise time and resources to identify a challenging issue to address through PB of a mainstream budget.



Interested in participatory budgeting or community planning in the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council area?

Please contact the Community Planning, Policy & Research Department at Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council.

☎ 0300 0300 900

✉ communityplanning@armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk

🌐 armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk/communityplanning

Follow us  

TAKE500+
YOUR COMMUNITY, YOUR VOICE, YOUR CHOICE!

