



## THE ROLE OF PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN PROMOTING LOCALISM AND MOBILISING COMMUNITY ASSETS

But where next for Participatory Budgeting in Scotland?

Learning from the Govanhill Equally Well test site

Chris Harkins

James Egan

**Glasgow Centre for Population Health**

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## Executive Summary

Participatory Budgeting (PB) means involving local residents in deciding how to spend public money. At its core PB is about local people shaping local services to more effectively meet local priorities.

Since 2008, the Govanhill neighbourhood in South East Glasgow has been one of a range of Equally Well test sites operating across Scotland. Equally Well is a key Scottish Government policy to reduce the nation's health inequalities. Govanhill is a diverse and transient neighbourhood facing stark social, economic and health inequalities relative to the Scottish average. In responding to these challenges Community Planning Partners in Govanhill have developed several progressive local interventions and approaches. One such approach has been to use Equally Well funds to establish a PB pilot within Govanhill.

In 2010 the Govanhill Community Action (GoCA) group was allocated £200,000 in PB funds and tasked with deciding and being held accountable for its spend locally. GoCA consists of representatives from local community groups in Govanhill and throughout this PB pilot the group received facilitative support from Oxfam's UK Poverty Programme in Scotland. This report is the product of a qualitative study of the Govanhill PB pilot; both the study and the report were undertaken by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health.

The present study finds the GoCA members to be capable, skilled and passionate. The group embraced the responsibility afforded to them through the PB process and were considered and strategic in their use of the PB funds. The projects funded were ambitious and diverse, demonstrating fresh thinking and local insight. The choice of projects funded confirmed an acute understanding of local issues. Interestingly the projects were unanimous in prioritising 'people ahead of place'. Crucially, within a neighbourhood where community engagement has proven especially challenging, the PB process has enabled purposeful and reciprocal dialogue between community members and the public and third sectors. Indeed the role of the third sector has proven vital to the PB process and in augmenting these relationships.

Learning from the Govanhill PB pilot is of both local importance and national relevance. Like any democratic process there are aspects of the Govanhill PB pilot which could have been improved upon. Community representation within the PB process was compromised by the perceived time pressure on the entire pilot. The present study also questions local expectations of 'community representation' and describes a largely unreported potential barrier to community participation in local decision making. Also discussed is the issue of transparency within PB processes; the study makes pragmatic recommendations thereon. Overall the study concludes that the PB pilot in Govanhill was a positive and valued experience for all concerned.

Analysis of key UK and Scottish social policy in the present study suggests that there is widespread support for community empowerment and for enhanced localism, transparency, pluralism and voluntarism. PB fits entirely with these values and principles. Within Scotland, PB is potentially an important tool in responding to key public sector reform messages within the Christie Commission. Furthermore PB may be a practical mechanism from which to mobilise community assets; potentially generating evidence and furthering the understanding of this emerging approach to health improvement in Scotland.

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## 1.0 Introduction to the study and setting the scene

Since 2008, the Govanhill neighbourhood in South East Glasgow has been one of a range of Equally Well test sites<sup>1:2</sup> operating across Scotland. Equally Well<sup>3-5</sup> is a key Scottish Government policy to reduce the nation's stark health inequalities. In addition to facing a range of social, economic and health inequalities, Govanhill is also a diverse and transient neighbourhood where over 50 different languages are spoken on a daily basis. In responding to these challenges and under the Equally Well banner of 'doing different things and doing things differently', Community Planning Partners<sup>6</sup> in Govanhill have developed several progressive local projects and approaches<sup>7</sup>. One such approach has been to use Equally Well funds to establish a Participatory Budgeting (PB) pilot within Govanhill.

The PB Unit<sup>8</sup> is a national third sector resource to support the development of PB in the UK. The Unit provides a comprehensive definition of PB:

*'PB directly involves local people in making decisions on the spending and priorities for a defined public budget. PB processes can be defined by geographical area (whether that's neighbourhood or larger) or by theme. This means engaging residents and community groups representative of all parts of the community to discuss and vote on spending priorities, make spending proposals, and vote on them, as well giving local people a role in the scrutiny and monitoring of the process and results to inform subsequent PB decisions.'*<sup>9</sup>

In 2010 the Govanhill Community Action (GoCA) group<sup>10</sup> was allocated £200,000 in PB funds, and tasked with deciding how it would be spent locally and with accountability for the spend. GoCA consists of representatives from local community groups in Govanhill and throughout this PB pilot the group received facilitative support from Oxfam's UK Poverty Programme in Scotland<sup>11</sup>.

This report describes a qualitative study<sup>i</sup> of the PB work undertaken by GoCA. Reference will be made to the current PB literature, its contemporary roots, potential benefits of the approach and its development in the UK – and to its limited application in Scotland. The study findings will be discussed within the context of key Scottish Government policy drivers including the public sector reform agenda, localism and the asset based approach to health improvement.

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<sup>i</sup> An external evaluation resource was incorporated within Govanhill's Equally Well test site status. This evaluation work, designed to capture local learning, has been undertaken by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH). For more details on the Govanhill test site evaluation please visit:

[www.gcph.co.uk/assets/0000/0790/Govanhill\\_Equally\\_Well\\_Test\\_Site\\_web.pdf](http://www.gcph.co.uk/assets/0000/0790/Govanhill_Equally_Well_Test_Site_web.pdf)

The GCPH is also the lead organisation in undertaking and reporting on this PB study.

## 1.1 Introduction to Participatory Budgeting

PB appears to originate from Porto Alegre in Brazil (in 1989) following the demise of Brazil's military dictatorship<sup>12</sup>. These early years of PB were born out of the desire to reallocate public money locally and democratically to where it was needed most.

Evaluation of the early work in Porto Alegre is positive, concluding that improvements in facilities have resulted directly from projects prioritised through PB by the community<sup>13;14</sup>. For example, sewer and water connections increased from 75% of households in 1988 to 98% by 1997 and the number of schools in Porto Alegre has quadrupled since 1986<sup>15</sup>. Through the example set in Porto Alegre, PB has established itself as a well utilised democratic process in several Latin American countries<sup>16</sup>.

## 1.2 The benefits of Participatory Budgeting

The most comprehensive UK-based review of PB is the 2011 'Communities in the driving seat: a study of Participatory Budgeting in England' study<sup>17</sup>. This study was commissioned by the UK Government's Department for Communities and Local Government<sup>18</sup>. The study adopted an in-depth and rigorous case-study approach across several diverse PB pilots in England.

The study concluded that PB was most effective when used in conjunction with other community engagement processes and that overall confidence in PB can only be increased by decision-making processes which are followed up by the delivery of high quality projects. The study also looked at how PB could change or be adopted within mainstream services. It found that PB could attract additional funds into deprived areas by providing an effective means of distributing resources that funders felt confident they could engage with. The implementation of PB had also led to innovative projects receiving funding; breaking the status quo in some areas.

The implementation of PB was shown to improve the transparency and quality of information available to service providers and communities, thereby enabling them to meet local priorities more effectively. The study also reported how the PB process demonstrated the need for greater public coordination and partnership working between Community Planning Partners, in order to meet complex local needs. Crucially PB was described as opening up new channels of communication between the public sector and 'hard-to-reach' community members.

A range of social and human capital benefits were evidenced in the evaluation. PB was shown to improve individuals' and organisations' self-confidence in tackling neighbourhood issues and in negotiating with public sector organisations. PB also brought together people from different backgrounds, enabling them to pool knowledge, skills and experience to tackle local concerns. Furthermore, PB directly increased community group membership. The positive findings of this study are consistent with other PB literature and evaluations<sup>19-22</sup>.

## 1.3 UK approaches to Participatory Budgeting

Here in the UK, PB initiatives have ranged in both scale and approach, although statistics in relation to UK PB are estimates only. The scale of UK PB project funds have ranged from approximately £500 to £2.5million, and it is believed that in the region of £28m has been allocated through PB to 140 projects in England<sup>23</sup>. Wales has an estimated 20 projects and Scotland has just eight recognised PB projects to date<sup>24</sup>.

Community Grants<sup>9</sup> form the most common approach to PB in the UK. Typically this approach involves local residents or community groups submitting funding proposals and then voting on which community projects should receive the funding. Community Grants are usually small pots of money earmarked for ‘use in the community’ and are administered through public sector organisations.

Another approach to PB is referred to as ‘top-slicing’<sup>9</sup>. This approach involves an agreed proportion of the public service investment budget being set aside in order that its spend is decided entirely by local community members. Top-slicing PB is normally implemented in predefined geographical areas, such as neighbourhoods or local council wards. While top-slicing PB accounted for up to 20% of public service investment expenditure in Porto Alegre, the PB Unit has set a target of 1% for the UK<sup>25</sup>. The PB Unit states that this target is a realistic starting point in the UK where PB approaches are not widely adopted. A 1% allocation, the PB Unit argues, would mean a sizeable budget to begin meaningful PB but would not eat in to statutory service provision.

#### 1.4 Participatory Budgeting within the current UK political landscape

##### Definition of key terms used in this report:

**Localism** – In its broadest sense, localism describes a range of political philosophies which prioritise local control of government, localised services, local culture and identity. Localism has been re-emergent within UK politics. Its supporters argue that by ‘re-localising’ democratic and economic processes and decision making, social, economic and environmental problems will be more accurately defined and effective solutions more easily created.

**Transparency** – The current UK Government has strongly asserted its commitment to increasing transparency across Whitehall and local authorities in order to make information more readily available to communities; allowing them to hold service providers to account. The government hopes that this increased transparency will also encourage greater innovation and entrepreneurship in public service delivery. Greater transparency will enable community groups, voluntary organisations and small businesses to compete more effectively for contracts, bringing fresh thinking to the table.

**Pluralism** – Pluralism is a term used in different ways in many contexts but generally describes a diversity of views, which stand in opposition to one single view or approach. Pluralism within the political sphere (often termed classical pluralism) is the view that power and decision making is mostly within government but that many non-government organisations and community groups should use their resources and assets to exert influence within the decision making process. A central debate within classical pluralism concerns which political process is best placed to distribute this described power and influence. Increasingly in contemporary political discourse the term is used in relation to notions of diversity and representation within the political or democratic process.

**Voluntarism** – Voluntarism generally refers to the reliance or use of voluntary participation or action (without payment or coercion) to achieve a given purpose: for example, delivering a community project or service or maintaining a local building. Voluntarism is also applicable to the implementation of government policy and has become increasingly prominent in recent political dialogue, with increasing appetite for community involvement within public service delivery. In this context voluntarism also refers to community members volunteering their time, experience and knowledge in defining local priorities and in developing localised partnership responses.

### 1.4.1 Public Sector Reform and the localism agenda

PB appears to tick many policy boxes. PB's values of localism, transparency, pluralism and voluntarism are at the core of the current political discourse<sup>26</sup>. These values appear to be supported by both the left and right politically, due to the blanket appeal of community-led solutions to public service delivery<sup>27</sup>. PB's principles are entirely consistent with the UK Government's 2011 Localism Act<sup>28</sup> and the vision of the Big Society<sup>29</sup> which at its core outlines people having more power over public sector planning decisions, and voluntary or community groups potentially running some public services.

Within Scotland, the policy landscape also appears supportive of PB approaches. The 2009 'Scottish Community Empowerment Action Plan, Celebrating Success: Inspiring Change'<sup>30</sup> states that increased emphasis on enhanced localised participatory and democratic processes is crucial within the challenging economic times and fundamental to addressing the nation's inequalities in health, wealth and opportunities. The 'Specific Actions' section within the plan recognises the role that PB can play in realising this vision; initiating a programme of PB pilots<sup>31</sup> amongst other community empowerment initiatives.

The 2011 'Christie Commission' on the Future Delivery of Public Services outlines a comprehensive public service reform agenda<sup>32</sup>. To achieve 'more for less', one of Christie's key reform messages involves the devolution of power and responsibility to communities, ensuring that they work alongside the public and third sector as equal partners in defining and responding to local priorities:

*'Reforms must aim to empower individuals and communities receiving public services by involving them in the design and delivery of the services they use.'*

### 1.4.2 Health and the asset based approach to health improvement

The PB approach is also entirely consistent with current international thinking about health improvement. One of the central messages of the 2010 Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England is that greater power and decision making should lie with communities:

*'Effective local delivery requires effective participatory decision-making at local levels. This can only happen by empowering individuals and local communities.'*

This review, chaired by Sir Michael Marmot, argues that increased community participation would significantly enhance local public service effectiveness; tailoring delivery within the local context, promoting equal access and improving outcomes<sup>33</sup>.

The emerging asset based approach to health improvement' discourse in Scotland also supports community empowerment and participation, calling for professionals to shift their approaches from thinking of a community's deficits and greatest needs towards recognising and building on the strengths of community members and the assets within communities<sup>34:35</sup>. Central to this approach is the establishment of a meaningful dialogue between the public and voluntary sectors and communities in order that services might more effectively utilise identified community resource and assets.



## 1.5 Participatory Budgeting in the UK and Scotland: the current picture

The links between PB and the UK Government's Localism Act and Big Society developments appear obvious, but some have criticised the Government for 'not saying enough' about the role PB could play in the implementation of these policies<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, until calls for PB proposals from the Big Society Network in 2011 it was argued that communities themselves were the 'missing dimensions' in the discussion as to how to realise the Big Society<sup>36</sup>.

The lack of consideration given to the implementation of the localism agenda in general has been seen as endemic of a policy which some have described as merely a shallow and cynical attempt by the UK Government to justify cuts in services and support, using the language of empowerment and reinvigoration<sup>37</sup>.

As noted above, PB in the UK has predominantly taken the form of small-scale Community Grants, with little in the way of top-slicing. Some commentators have described PB's current incarnations as bland<sup>27</sup>, marginal and limited<sup>24</sup>. PB programmes thus far have also been described as an inconsistent and indeterminate commitment from the public sector to 'community engagement'<sup>27</sup>. The impact and outcomes achieved under this curtailed form of PB have also been questioned. Kevin Curley, Chief Executive of the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (in England), says that despite being "*enthusiastic*" about participatory budgeting:

*'Many of the community budgeting exercises so far have been frankly marginal. Giving local councillors and groups small amounts to spend on traffic calming, improving play areas and smartening up community buildings barely touches the big problems local people face.'*<sup>24</sup>

In Scotland the use of PB of any form has been limited. This point is underlined by the way in which the PB Unit reported the 2009 Scottish anti-social behaviour PB pilots<sup>31</sup> as:

*'... the first PB in Scotland for a number of years.'*<sup>38</sup>

The mainstream roll-out of PB in Scotland may present structural, cultural and practical obstacles – not least, perhaps, in relation to local elected members, whose role under this new form of direct (as opposed to representative) democracy may have to evolve. A permanent challenge to PB is the achievement of true 'community representation' and the successful engagement of marginalised or disadvantaged individuals in the process. Much of the PB literature and policy warns of the dangers of the 'loudest community members appearing to speak for the majority'<sup>39</sup>.

It should be recognised that no democratic process is ever perfect. Indeed, most of the negative commentary surrounding PB is perhaps attributable to the arguably anaemic form it has taken to date. With greater transparency around public service budgets and greater utilisation of community assets and skills, PB could emerge as a central mechanism through which communities can align effort and pool funds to tackle locally defined priorities.

So where now for PB in Scotland? The Christie Commission report<sup>32</sup> states that there has never been a more fertile political and fiscal landscape for fundamental change within the public sector to take root. With the pressing and immediate desire to achieve 'more for less' it may be the right time to embed a more visible and sustained

commitment to PB approaches within Scotland. In order for this to happen, convincing evidence is required that the decisions taken through PB represent better value than can be achieved through normal public sector investment decision making. Greater clarity and understanding of the PB process, best practice and governance arrangements within it, are also important steps. Crucially, agreement needs to be reached as to which aspects of budgets could be 'available' for PB and which aspects (for statutory or other reasons) are not suited to this approach.

The scale of the PB pilot in Govanhill is at a level commensurate with a small-scale Community Grant PB. However, the approach represents a progressive and important step for local Community Planning Partners. Learning from the Govanhill PB pilot is also of national relevance, adding to the limited literature and evidence concerning PB's application in Scotland. The Govanhill experience may also illuminate important considerations in the national response to the Christie Commission and in the development of the asset based approach to health improvement.

## 2.0 Methods

In considering the appropriate methods for this study, several PB studies and evaluations were considered<sup>19;20;22;40-45</sup>. The literature reviewed points to four key elements in the implementation of PB which have been shown to have a crucial bearing on the success or quality of PB programmes. These include:

1. **The launch of PB:** requires senior level commitment to PB, and the provision of resource to enable effective PB processes and fund meaningful projects
2. **Gearing up for PB:** clarity as to the scope and vision of the PB programme is vital, as is effective marketing, adequate planning and development time, suitable leadership, facilitation and partnership development
3. **The PB process:** effective communication, transparent, democratic decision making and robust governance and evaluation all contribute to building confidence in PB
4. **Community representation:** is a fundamental theme in PB, including attention to the avoidance of bias in decision making arising from an unrepresentative community group.

The four PB elements above were used as a broad theoretical framework when deciding on the study methods, developing the fieldwork schedule and approaching the analysis.

The primary data collection method in this study was focus groups conducted with GoCA members. Focus groups are an established method for accessing personal experiences and for facilitating more in-depth understandings of participants' views<sup>46</sup>. It has been suggested that focus groups are particularly effective in encouraging participation from disadvantaged, excluded populations<sup>47</sup>. Although they may take many forms, the method essentially entails engaging a small number of participants in a group discussion, focused around a particular set of issues.

Two focus groups were conducted with GoCA members in January 2011. This was deemed an appropriate time to perform the focus groups as the entire PB process had been completed by late 2010. The focus groups took place at the beginning of a regular monthly GoCA meeting held within the Govanhill Housing Association. The GoCA members attending the meeting had given prior consent to participating in the study. For the purpose of the focus group discussions, the group members were asked to separate into two groups (n=9, n=8). Each focus group was facilitated by an experienced researcher (Chris Harkins (CH) and Katherine Trebeck) and took place in a private room. Both focus groups lasted in the region of 40 minutes and were audio-recorded using a portable digital device, with the permission of all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured and participants were encouraged to be frank and honest with their contributions. Both focus groups followed the same semi-structured schedule. The focus group schedule asked participants to reflect on the PB elements two, three and four above (for example, questions included "*when did you first hear about the PB process and were you clear on what it meant and would entail?*", "*please describe the stages of the PB process that the group went through from the initial meeting until the funding decisions were made?*" and "*please describe in detail how the funding decisions were made at the proposals meeting?*").

Minutes and agendas of GoCA meetings were also used as a data source in this study. These documents supplemented the focus group data providing important details in relation to the PB process and its timeline.

In addition to the GoCA minutes, agenda documents and focus group data, the study incorporates data from the wider evaluation of the Govanhill Equally Well test site, gathered over the period from November 2009 to November 2011, in order to further understanding of PB elements one, two and four above. These data were gathered through a triangulation of qualitative methods comprising ethnographic participant observation, interviews and focus groups. The evaluation plan for the Govanhill Equally Well test site<sup>48</sup> provides in depth detail of the methods involved.

The transcribed GoCA focus groups and test site evaluation data were analysed separately using thematic analysis (one of the most common approaches to analysing qualitative data, especially within the field of health-related research)<sup>49</sup>. Thematic analysis involves coding respondents' talk into categories that summarise and systemise the content of the data<sup>50</sup>. The quality of the analysis was ensured through regular review meetings involving two analysts throughout the process (CH) and James Egan (JE)<sup>51;52</sup>.

The lead analyst (CH) read through transcripts several times, in order to be thoroughly familiar with the data and identify key themes and initial codes. Initial codes were identified and discussed with the second analyst (JE) and data related to each code were collated under the four PB elements described above. Over the course of subsequent meetings this coding structure was discussed and further refined with JE. Multiple coding, such as that adopted in this review, has been advocated as a way in which to refine coding frames and enhance rigor within qualitative studies<sup>53</sup>. The coded data were then arranged into potential PB process descriptor themes and learning themes, again by CH, using a process whereby the identified themes were compared across the data. Interpretations of identified themes were discussed with JE, and re-assessed and re-interpreted as necessary.

Direct quotes from the data were grouped under thematic headings<sup>54</sup>, providing a clear illustration of each theme and the strength of opinion attached to each theme. Finally, the themes were refined through investigation both of similar and anomalous examples<sup>55</sup>. Towards the end of this analysis the five elements of the PB process and seven distinct learning themes were identified. No further themes emerged, which suggests that the most important themes had been identified.

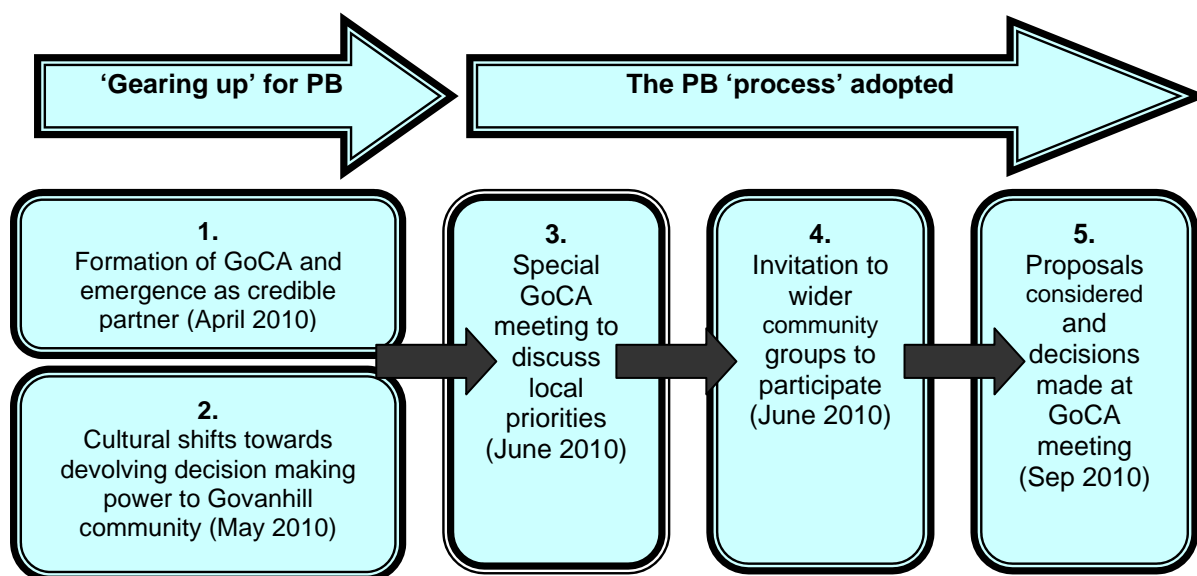
A qualitative data indexing package (Atlas.ti) was used to facilitate coding and retrieval of the data. Quotations were chosen to illustrate particular points and are included in the report in an anonymous form.



### 3.0 Results

#### 3.1 Defining the Participatory Budgeting Govanhill pilot

Analysis of the data gathered through the focus-groups with GoCA members and through the wider Equally Well evaluation in Govanhill points to there being five sequential components or steps within the PB programme adopted in Govanhill. The first two components can be described as being part of the 'gearing up phase', the later three reflect the actual PB process that was adopted by the group:



#### 3.2 Gearing up for PB in Govanhill

##### 3.2.1 The formation of GoCA

The 'gearing up' phase of the Govanhill PB programme was comprised of two serendipitous events or components. The first was a moment of timely synergism which saw the formation of the GoCA group during a regular meeting of the Govanhill Community Development Trust (GCDT)<sup>56</sup> in April 2010. The drivers for the formation of GoCA were voiced clearly by the now GoCA members recalling the meeting. Primarily these drivers were escalating frustration and concern as to the perceived lack of community consultation in the development of a Govanhill regeneration strategy. The GoCA members recounted how the GCDT members were unanimous that Govanhill required an immediate, strong and representative community voice to engage with the public and voluntary sector as an equal partner in shaping Govanhill's future. To this end in April 2010 the GCDT wrote to all known community groups in the area inviting a representative from each group to join the newly formed GoCA group.

Both the public sector employees concerned and the GoCA members spoke positively about the group's formation:

*"... the group surely I think started because of the severe problems that were in Govanhill ... it brought most of the community groups in the area together to form GoCA ... it was a very positive step, incredibly positive."*

GoCA member

Evaluation evidence supports that GoCA quickly emerged as a credible partner within local community planning structures:

*"... the group [GoCA] have gotten together quickly and effortlessly it would seem, they have a lot of experience and crucially the insight into the area that as non-residents we [public sector organisation] could never have."*

Public Sector Worker

### **3.2.2 Cultural shifts towards devolved decision making within Govanhill**

The second component in the gearing up for PB phase involves the evidenced cultural shifts within local Community Planning Partnership arrangements towards devolving complete decision making power and accountability to the Govanhill community as to how to spend the Equally Well funds. The £200,000 of Equally Well funds were earmarked for 'community engagement' but the exact nature of this engagement was undecided in late 2009.

Analysis of substantial fieldwork data gathered through the wider test site evaluation supports that this cultural shift amongst local public sector employees was as a result of persistent influence exerted largely by the Govanhill Housing Association and Oxfam UK. In late 2009 the idea of 'handing over' the Equally Well funds to the community was perceived as a radical and potentially risky strategy by some public sector employees. By 2010 and into 2011 those same employees spoke of this as being *"the right thing to do"*.

PB was seen as increasingly credible by these local third sector partners given the emerging emphasis on devolved decision making within the Scottish political landscape over this period. The Scottish Government (who provided the Equally Well funds) was receptive to the PB pilot being a good use of the funds, providing sound evaluation of the process was in place.

Evaluation evidence suggests that GoCA, with its credibility and standing, proved to be an opportune and trusted 'destination' or vessel through which to mobilise the cultural shifts towards initiating the PB programme. The arrival of GoCA was expedient given that wider evaluation evidence from the Govanhill test site suggests that the public sector organisations have found community engagement challenging in this diverse and transient community.

The Community Health Care Partnership (CHCP) representative responsible for the administration of the Equally Well community engagement funds stated at the GoCA meeting in May 2010 that his organisation was supportive of the community deciding how to spend and being accountable for the Equally Well money. The CHCP representative was explicit that the process would have to be as far reaching and democratic as possible and would require the submission of funding proposals and transparent decision making. Furthermore, there had to be agreement from the outset that recipients of funding would adhere to governance procedures and provide regular

monitoring updates to the CHCP and the GoCA group. Workers from the CHCP, Govanhill Housing Association and City Property also stated that they would offer support in relation to the development of funding proposals, the decision making process and subsequent governance requirements. Emphasis was placed on the role these organisations could play in terms of supporting the community groups in ensuring value for money within the agreed proposals.

There were 15 GoCA members at this May meeting, representing 10 local community groups. Twenty-three members from 15 other groups were not present. Minutes of the meeting confirm that all in attendance agreed to these fundamental principles of democracy, transparency and accountability within the decision making and funding process as described by the CHCP worker. The Oxfam representative proved pivotal in building awareness and understanding at this meeting that essentially the group was describing a PB process and that PB could fulfil the CHCP's requirements and was an internationally recognised, localised democratic process. All in attendance were in agreement to the use of PB for the allocation of the funds and that the Oxfam worker was best placed to facilitate the process.

Early discussion took place at this meeting concerning increasing GoCA's community reach and representation. It was believed that all community groups operating in Govanhill were known to the GoCA group and it was recognised that all of these groups (n=25) had already received the GoCA agenda and minutes via email in an ongoing effort to increase attendance and participation. It was agreed that the minutes of the meeting should reflect clearly that the GoCA group were to begin a PB process with the Equally Well funds and that all community groups were invited to participate. The agenda for the next meeting to take place on 24 June 2010 detailed that the majority of the meeting would be devoted to initial discussion of local priorities and early planning of the PB process.

The decision to pursue a PB approach was formally approved when the local Community Planning Partnership arrangement, namely the Govanhill Neighbourhood Management Group (GNMG), met after the summer recess in August 2010. At this meeting the CHCP worker described the characteristics of the planned approach and outlined some of the themes identified at that stage. The GNMG was supportive of the PB pilot and the themes described.

### **3.3 The Participatory Budgeting decision making process adopted in Govanhill**

#### **3.3.1 Special GoCA meeting to discuss local priorities**

In both focus groups, the GoCA members were consistent in their recollection of the PB process. The first stage of the process was described as being a special meeting of the group in June 2010 to discuss, identify and prioritise local themes which would benefit from the available resource. Twenty one individuals attended this meeting, representing 12 local community groups. Nineteen people from 13 other community groups were not present. This meeting was facilitated by Oxfam. GoCA members emphasised the importance of discussing what 'form' the projects would take:

*"The structure of the decision making process was quite interesting, the first of those meetings we sort of broke into little groups and discussed not any particular project or where we might put the funds, we discussed what type of projects, how those projects might benefit the community, would it be a family project, would it be something over arching to provide services, maybe it could*

*be ... there was a proposal I think that we could fund, or that the money could be used to fund a person, a human being, human resource.”*

GoCA member

The facilitator began by prompting the group to think about priority themes and issues affecting Govanhill. At this stage the group was broken into two in order that discussion might be more inclusive and manageable than would have been possible within the full group. The separate groups took notes during their discussions and reported back on the outcomes of the discussion when the whole group reconvened. Discussion took cognisance of the progress being made by local Community Planning Partners and the Govanhill Hub<sup>7</sup> on certain local priorities. The group then considered what issues, themes or current approaches had been less effective. The members then considered a mixture of potential themes which would offer support for local residents as well as enhancing local efforts to clamp down on specific, repetitive criminal and generally damaging behaviours.

The facilitator then summarised the separate groups' discussion themes which prompted further dialogue regarding priorities for the area. At this stage the group had arrived at four broad themes:

- ④ The partial re-opening of the Govanhill Baths as a focal community venue
- ④ Enhancing local resources to tackle rogue landlords and to support victims of this criminality
- ④ The creation of a post which would help local community groups to attract funding
- ④ Some form of respite service for families affected by addictions

The identified themes at this stage would be expected to translate into funding proposals from three of the 12 community groups attending the June 2010 meeting. GoCA members reported a general convergence of opinion around these themes and high levels of agreement. There was no evidence of dissent from those organisations that did not stand to benefit from the funding. Even at this early juncture there was broad discussion, unrelated to the themes identified, as to levels of funding for successful proposals and longer-term sustainability, taking cognisance of 'what works locally' and how the PB funded projects could link to existing partnerships in the area to maximise their impact. Interestingly it appeared that there was agreement that the successful proposals (whether those described above or otherwise) should receive sizeable and equal levels of funding. The focus group participants were unanimous that they did not want the PB monies broken down into small amounts to be used in small, unsustainable projects.

### **3.3.2 Invitation to wider community groups to participate**

The focus group participants reported that there was commitment within the June 2010 meeting to broadening the engagement and participation in the PB pilot and the facilitator was keen to develop this discussion. Some focus group participants described being disappointed that, despite receiving the GoCA minutes and agenda as usual, the community groups which were not regular GoCA attendees had not attended the special meeting to participate in the PB pilot. GoCA members described how, although themes had been discussed at this stage, the group remained open to new participants within the PB process and to new themes and ideas. To this end, it was agreed that an additional letter would be sent to the known community groups explicitly describing the PB pilot and the availability of the Equally Well funds, and inviting their participation in the PB process – both to take part in the decision making process and to submit funding proposals. The letter also stated that support was



available for the development of proposals and gave contact details for interested community groups to find out more and to access the support. The letter was sent in late June 2010:

*“Everybody was written to, all the groups that we knew about had been subsequently identified by others that we know about, they had all been written to and informed of this groups [GoCA] existence and of what was going on [the PB programme].”*

GoCA member

Some focus group participants viewed the availability of the Equally Well resource as potentially a good incentive for non-engaged community groups to become active members of the GoCA group:

*“... there are enough groups who are not here [attending GoCA] that we should be doing some active recruitment, and if the active recruitment is “hey ho, we’ve got some cash, you could maybe at least be instrumental in deciding how we spend it, it might not come to you, but you could be part of that process”, you know, that could work to broaden the process [PB] out like that and I don’t think that that’s a bad thing to get folk involved with the money available”*

GoCA member

Focus group participants recalled discussion at the June meeting that, if the invitation letter had encouraged significant additional interest, the group would have had to revise and lengthen the PB process.

### **3.3.3 Proposals considered and decisions made at GoCA meeting**

The final stage of the PB process involved a special meeting of the GoCA group to hear proposal presentations and to vote on which proposals would be funded. This meeting took place in September 2010 with 21 individuals in attendance from 13 community groups. On this occasion, 21 members, from 12 community groups, did not attend. The focus group participants expressed surprise and regret that at this stage there was not greater participation beyond the community groups which regularly attend the GoCA meetings. Some GoCA members on reflection questioned the effectiveness of the PB invitation letter.

Four proposal presentations were heard and discussed. These came from three community groups, represented by a total of five individuals at the meeting. It was noted that the proposals had each received various levels of support from the CHCP, City Property and Govanhill Housing Association since the last meeting. The meeting was again facilitated by Oxfam. Each group presented its proposal with supporting documentation and the presentation was followed by a facilitated group question and discussion session. Focus group participants recalled how the questioning and discussion was multi-faceted but central themes concerned how the proposed projects would engage ‘hard-to-reach’ sections of the Govanhill community and in what ways the projects would directly impact and improve upon the lives of Govanhill residents. Discussion also touched on the understanding of local needs and learning from existing local working and research. The role of the Govanhill Housing Association as a local anchor organisation from which to base the funded projects was also discussed. Longer-term sustainability of the proposals was questioned amidst discussion as to where these proposed projects might ‘plug the gaps’ between public sector organisations and the services they deliver. How and in what ways the




proposals would align with local regeneration and service delivery was also considered important during discussions.

The four proposals were heard individually with group discussion, questioning and voting for ‘approval in principle’ occurring after each proposal was heard. The approval in principle was sought by the Oxfam facilitator who was seeking broad support or agreement for the proposal just heard. This was done by simply asking the members if they supported the proposal; positive verbal responses were voiced by all the other GoCA members at the end of each presentation. After the voting at the end of each proposal the Oxfam facilitator then asked if any group member had any concerns relating to any aspect of the proposal, its funding or the decision making process. There were no objections raised for any of the four projects. All four proposals that were heard were agreed. Once all four proposals were heard, discussed and approved in principle the facilitator then asked the group if any member had any concerns with the decisions made and the overall PB process adopted. Again, no concerns were raised by the GoCA members.

Interestingly, the proposals appeared to reflect earlier discussion relating to equal (or approximately equal) distribution of the PB funds amongst successful applicants. With minor adjustments agreed at the meeting, the four proposals totalled the available £200,000 of Equally Well monies. The CHCP worker commended the applicants on the quality and clarity of the proposals put forth, confirming that they generally met the governance standards required. Where there were minor issues, the CHCP worker proposed that he meet with successful applicants the week after the meeting to ensure all required details were in place.

From the data gathered it appeared that there was no preferential treatment for any of the agreed projects, all were equally valued and supported by those in attendance.

Details of the four funded projects from three local community groups and organisations, as well as the amount of Equally Well funds allocated to each project, are shown below:

<b>Funded projects</b>	<b>Equally Well funds awarded through Participatory Budgeting</b>
 Govanhill Addictions Family Support Group	<b>£40,000</b>
 Govanhill Community Justice Partnership	<b>£60,000</b>
 Govanhill Baths Trust <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- health and wellbeing programmes</li> <li>- capital grant</li> </ul>	<b>£50,000</b> <b>£50,000</b>

**Govanhill Addictions Family Support Group**

This project has two distinct elements. The first is the ‘Caring for oor ain’ Aftercare Project, the objective of which is to support families affected by drug addiction. The funding is to be used to establish an aftercare facility in the form of a static caravan. The facility will be used for respite for families or carers and not the family member with the addiction. The Family Support Group state in their proposal that:

*“The facility would help reduce stress and anxiety levels at times of family crisis. It would help reduce dependency on GP and other Primary Care services for family support and would help build a ‘caring for oor ain’ culture in*

*Govanhill. It would be a community asset. For children living within families affected by addiction ... the provision of the facility would promote positive, happy memories which will contribute to improving their resilience."*

The second element of the project is to provide drug and alcohol education within schools; involving recovered addicts in the delivery of the programme.

### **Govanhill Community Justice Partnership**

The focus of this project is to supplement existing partnership working in Govanhill to more effectively combat unlawful landlords operating within the area. Evidence suggests that the actions, or inaction, of some landlords in Govanhill has a profoundly detrimental effect on both the lives of Govanhill residents and the housing stock in the area. The funding is to be used to enhance the Govanhill Law Centre's legal resources to specifically target this aspect of criminality within Govanhill. The Law Centre will develop the Justice Partnership building upon existing relationships with Glasgow City Council, Govanhill Housing Association, Strathclyde Police and Govanhill community members themselves.

### **Govanhill Baths Trust**

The closure of the Govanhill Baths in 2001 has arguably taken on great significance within the Govanhill community. The Govanhill Baths Community Trust has been active for over nine years, campaigning for the Baths to be reopened. The Baths Trust argues that the closure of the Baths has become symbolic of an area in decline and a diverse community experiencing disempowerment and a disconnection from political processes. The Trust's mission is to:

*"... re-open the baths and at the same time contribute to the wider social, cultural and built regeneration of Govanhill as a community through our various activities."*

The Baths trust submitted two successful proposals. The first was to use the money for a capital grant to fund an initial phase of the complete regeneration of the Baths building. This will involve refurbishing a space in the front suite of the building.

The second funded Baths Trust project is a series of health and wellbeing programmes. These programmes will involve skills and confidence building in the areas of arts, cooking and gardening. These health and wellbeing programmes will utilise the Trust's strong community identity and networks to further improve community cohesion and increase social capital.

### **Rejected Theme**

A theme identified at the June 2010 meeting was the creation of a post which would help local community groups to attract funding. This theme was 'dropped' in the period between June and the decision making meeting in September 2010. Focus group participants described how the emergence of this theme sparked much discussion between GoCA members, the public sector organisations involved and the Govanhill Housing Association. It was agreed that this theme would be taken forward by Community Planning Partners separately from the PB pilot. The Govanhill Housing Association described how it had plans to recruit posts in 2011 which would contribute towards a more robust support of local community groups; including support to attract funding.

### 3.4 Learning themes from the Govanhill Participatory Budgeting pilot

The thematic analysis undertaken in the present study yielded seven core learning themes emergent from the Govanhill PB pilot.

#### 3.4.1 The importance of independent facilitation in the PB process

The GoCA members and public sector workers involved in the PB process were collectively positive about the facilitation role provided by Oxfam. This role was seen as pivotal not only in guiding the PB process but in enabling discussion which bridged the perceived 'gap' between the public sector workers and the GoCA members prior to initiating the process:

*"It was [Oxfam worker] who kind of eased us all into this notion that we should be kind of doing this [PB programme]."*

GoCA member

*"The facilitation role that [Oxfam worker] delivered was fundamental to the Participatory Budgeting process with GoCA, absolutely vital, and that is important to capture."*

Public Sector worker

Furthermore, an interconnecting theme emerging in many areas of the analysis was how the PB process has built stronger, more trusting and more respectful relationships between the GoCA members and the public sector employees who were involved. Again analysis indicates that the third sector involvement in the process, specifically Oxfam's facilitative role, proved pivotal to this. Importantly both groups have spoken clearly of being more aware of and more understanding of each others' perspectives on how to improve life in Govanhill:

*"From my point of view we [GoCA members and the public sector workers] have come a long way... my understanding of Govanhill and the types of...services or projects the community [GoCA members] want has broadened, I think as well, this [PB process] will help for the future."*

Public Sector worker

There is strong evidence in the data that almost all involved in the PB process view it as being a profound learning curve and forming a platform from which to build future community participation, devolved decision making and enhanced localism:

*"It's important to recognise that we [GoCA members and the public sector employees] are both on a journey and crucially we are or should be on that journey together, this type of approach [PB process] has been excellent in bringing both parties together for once and I think we are learning from each other...this [PB process] is the way forward."*

GoCA member

#### 3.4.2 Assets in action: GoCA members' capabilities, skills and insight into local priorities

##### ***Embracing empowerment and responsibility***

An unambiguous theme which emerged at an early stage in both focus groups was that the GoCA members welcomed the PB process wholeheartedly and embraced the



new responsibility that they felt. Some GoCA members even expressed relief that they were being 'trusted' to be accountable for and achieve value for money with the Equally Well funds. They were convinced from the outset that this would mean a more effective use of the resource in Govanhill:

*"It wasn't daunting in the slightest ... far from it."*

GoCA member

*"I felt relieved that the money was going to actually get used the way we needed in the community, so I was quite relieved at that."*

GoCA member

Two GoCA members voiced that they were hopeful that this pilot PB programme and its evaluation could demonstrate that communities across Scotland have the capabilities and assets to be trusted with this and larger scale PB programmes:

*"I think, well, to be honest I know that there is the perception that if resources are devolved to the community that it will be a 'rammy' [unruly scramble] for the scraps [of available resource], with community members fighting tooth and nail for what is available. This is not the case. We are intelligent people that can organise ourselves appropriately. We can prioritise and we know the area and its issues."*

GoCA member

*"I think it [Govanhill pilot PB programme] might give people up there, Directors, Officers or Councillors, or the Scottish Government, or whoever the knowledge that community people can organize themselves and are able, quite capable, to spend public money very wisely, even although we work in all the different fields or in different ways or whatever, we are capable of doing it."*

GoCA member

A GoCA member whose organisation benefitted from the PB process described how she felt increased responsibility for the Equally Well funds because the funding of the project was decided by community members and not through her organisation's normal funding routes:

*"I feel a real sense of responsibility to make sure that this funding [Equally Well PB funds] has a real impact on the lives of Govanhill residents. I feel I am responsible and accountable to the community- I mean that in a positive way."*

GoCA member

Also evident is the resentment some GoCA members felt in relation to the perceived lack of public sector community consultation and of initiatives to promote community participation in decision-making within Govanhill to date:

*"It's always been paternal, you know, we [public sector] know what's best for you [Govanhill community], that's what you'll do and this is what you are gonna get."*

GoCA member

### **Strategic and maximal use of funds**

Another theme emerging from the analysis is that GoCA members intended to be strategic with the use of the Equally Well monies, focussing on being realistic as to the

type of project that could have maximum impact on the lives of local residents with the monies available. Many factors were key to this discussion: whether to start new initiatives or supplement existing programmes or interventions in the area; the number of projects that could be funded; long-term sustainability of the funded projects; how the projects would fit with a long term vision for the area and could align with current public and third sector service provision in the area; and the types of issues and community members which 'fall within the gaps' between service providers under current service provision arrangements. The group also mentioned learning from what has worked locally and from wider regeneration evidence. Interestingly there appeared to be agreement to fund a few projects with 'meaningful' amounts of funding:

*"... we didn't want to just throw the money out in small amounts to everybody, we wanted to be strategic about it and say these are priorities for us in the area, we want to put decent chunks of money towards them rather than saying there is a wee bit of money there and there and there, we wanted to really make things happen."*

GoCA member

A sub-theme was the questionable impact and outcomes that had been achieved through current small community grants. Although this point was only directly mentioned on three occasions in the course of the two focus groups it drew strong agreement from all participants. This was not a criticism of the community groups who have been bidding for small grants. Rather, it demonstrated the GoCA membership's desire for a more strategic or coordinated approach to community grants; where community groups could pool or share grants to maximise their usage and local impact.

Another sub-theme was the emphasis GoCA members placed on partnerships and networks. There was strong commitment to use the resource in ways which would engage effectively with the wider Govanhill community through established partnerships and networks. The funded projects all demonstrated this ability in their proposals.

### ***Local priorities: people ahead of place***

Another important theme from the data was that the GoCA membership was in support of funding projects that had a direct and positive influence on the *lives* of Govanhill residents. Mirrored in this theme was how little emphasis or discussion time was devoted to Govanhill's physical environment. From the data analysis it is clear that the GoCA members placed far greater priority on providing projects for people rather than 'place'. This point is underlined when considering the four funded projects as recounted by a GoCA member in the focus group:

*"... I think that the areas where the funding was put were for legal support, and that underpins everything else, and can impact on a lot of issues, a lot of lives would benefit and so ... a post there [was to be] created at the Govanhill Law Centre,*

*... and then, we also felt that the family support group had a particular need, and people could see that that would be a very generously shared resource for a group in the community that really needed that kind of respite, for families affected by drugs, alcohol and other issues ... folk [GoCA members] could see it would be well utilised and would really, really help families [in Govanhill]*

*... and then there was the Baths Trust ... has been identified as the thing that most people recognize as being a key part of the regeneration of Govanhill, it's just a focus for the Govanhill community, I mean the baths, if the baths ever open it would be great, but regardless, it is a great focus to have there. So people definitely wanted to have money there, wanted to get the [Govanhill Baths] building open."*

GoCA member

Arguably the funding allocated to the Govanhill Baths capital grant could be seen as related to the physical regeneration of a derelict community building. However, the Baths Trust project is not spoken of in these terms within GoCA. Instead, GoCA members describe the use of the capital grant towards the partial reopening of the baths building as carrying potent symbolism for the Govanhill community: promoting community pride, empowerment and participation as well as increasing community cohesion and social capital.

### **3.4.3 Moving away from the status quo: new approaches from the GoCA members**

A striking observation emerging from the focus group discussions is simply how fundamentally different the PB funded projects were from projects and interventions which had been funded and delivered through local Community Planning Partnership structures in Govanhill. It appeared from the focus group analysis that there was no deliberate or conscious attempt for the projects to be risk-taking, 'different' or groundbreaking. In particular the caravan respite facility is a project that was unlikely to attract public sector funding under normal circumstances. Yet through the PB process community members spoke of this project in terms of being a 'common sense' respite resource for Govanhill residents with particularly complex stressors in their lives:

*"Drugs and alcohol affects just about everybody anyway or somebody in their families, they know somebody... the Family Support Group [proposal] the whole group [GoCA] feels that's very important... the positives is going to be how many people are going to be using that for the next six months, families getting a bit of respite."*

GoCA member

Similarly the Govanhill Baths Trust, which was born out of a hostile and protracted disagreement between many Govanhill community members and Glasgow City Council, seems an unlikely recipient of substantial local public sector funding. However through the PB process the Baths Trust's proposals emerged as popular and uncontentious projects.

### **3.4.4 Time pressures within the PB pilot**

A consistent and recurring theme emerging in both focus groups was the time pressure that GoCA members felt was placed on the entire PB process. The GoCA group members were aware that Equally Well funds would be made available for PB in May 2010:

*"It was stated at the time that there was this money [Equally Well funding], but it had to be spent by March ... use it or lose it."*

GoCA member

It appeared from the analyses that this time pressure was as a result of the perception that funding was required to be spent by the end of the financial year (2010/2011) with no option to carry the funds forward. The exact source of this time pressure is not clear from the data gathered. The understanding of the GoCA members was that if the PB pilot could not be quickly arranged and progressed then the Equally Well monies would be returned the Scottish Government:

*“we were only given a very short period of time to discuss this and get it off the ground, or we would have lost it [Equally Well funding].”*

GoCA member

### 3.4.5 Community representation within the Govanhill PB pilot

A strong theme emerging from the focus group data concerns stage four of the PB process. This stage was undertaken to broaden the participation and representation of the PB process. Due to the time pressures described, some GoCA members were concerned that this important stage in the PB process was not implemented as effectively as it could have been.

The GoCA members described their feeling that, due to the time constraints, awareness raising about the PB pilot amongst other community groups and the wider Govanhill community was compromised. Both focus groups also noted that there was one GoCA member who voiced concerns as to the inclusiveness of the PB process adopted. The focus group participants described how this member had not been present at the first PB meeting, and was subsequently written to – yet he complained that he was not aware of the PB process and did not have enough time to draft and submit a funding proposal on behalf of his community group. The focus group members acknowledged this viewpoint but felt that every effort had been made to engage widely with individuals and groups within the timescale:

*“I think the people that weren’t there that night [first special meeting of GoCA to discuss PB priority themes], I think everybody [all known community groups in Govanhill] was written to and, it was on the agenda for the next [GoCA] meeting, to bring your funding proposals.”*

*“Yes, and some of them still didn’t bring any proposals, so we couldn’t wait.”*

*“I think it was a very fair way of doing it...I’m quite surprised that the people that got the information as soon as everybody else didn’t turn up, didn’t put their proposals forward.”*

GoCA members

Other GoCA members were critical of the communications sent to the wider community groups in Govanhill. A lack of urgency was cited as the main reason why greater inclusion was not achieved through the materials used. Again, time pressure was mentioned as being damaging to the development of the communication materials:

*“I think part of the [desired] slower process would be a broader involvement ... all the groups that we knew about had all been written to and informed of this group’s [GoCA] existence and of what was going on [PB pilot], but it wasn’t particularly maybe urgent enough for them, it didn’t say in big letters at the top of the letter ‘if you want cash, come to this meeting’ [Laughter] you*

*know, and I think maybe that could be spelled out more clearly, so that other people who weren't here would understand the importance of coming to that next meeting with their proposal."*

GoCA member

It transpired that no additional proposals were received beyond the original four emerging from the 'stage three GoCA meeting in May 2010. Some focus group participants were pragmatic about this given the time pressures:

*"I think we were quite fortunate in how many groups had come forward [three groups with four proposals] ... I think there would have been under real pressure if there had been eight or nine around the table."*

GoCA member

However, drawing on data gathered in the wider evaluation of the Govanhill test site, the GoCA group's representativeness of the Govanhill community has been questioned in general terms by some public sector workers:

*"I think it's great that these people [GoCA members] are giving up their own time and energy to meet...but I do question how representative the group is of the Govanhill community. Where are the Roma people? Is this group giving a voice to the 'down trodden'? My understanding is that some of the group don't even live in the area."*

Public Sector Worker

### **3.4.6 Transparency within the PB process**

Three of the 17 focus group participants raised issues relating to 'stage 5' of the PB process. This stage involved the GoCA meeting where PB proposals were heard and the funding decisions made in an open forum. Concerns were voiced as to whether this open discussion promoted genuine participation in the decision making process, particularly for GoCA members who had submitted proposals.

For these individuals, some articulated that they felt uncomfortable contributing to the discussion of another proposal when their proposal had been funded or (especially) was still to be heard. This discomfort appeared to arise from a fear that criticising another bid might jeopardise your own proposal. Two GoCA members independently questioned whether any of the funding applicants could remain truly objective towards other applicants competing for the same resource. In these instances the complete transparency of the open forum proved a barrier to democratic participation. This viewpoint was recognised by the other focus-group members once raised:

*"the only time I felt pressurised, I felt how do I handle this because I wanted the money for my group...it's difficult in front of the other [applicant] groups ... then you've to give your opinion on them [other funding applicants] I felt uncomfortable doing that."*

GoCA member

Furthermore some GoCA members made reference to established relationships between potential applicants and public and voluntary sector organisations involved in the PB pilot and how this hypothetically might compromise the transparency of the process. These relationships were described by a minority of GoCA members as



potentially having a bearing on the outcome of the process and the likelihood of receiving funding:

*“And if you [PB funding applicant] were more connected [to public and voluntary sector workers involved in PB process] on a kind of informal lobbying point of view, presumably that would have had an influence on the proposals ... it would have had the potential to do so.”*

GoCA member

*“I don’t know what went on behind the scenes but it might have affected how things [PB process] panned out.”*

GoCA member

### **3.4.7 The identity of ‘the community’ and the desire for ‘community professionalism’**

An interesting observation within the focus groups concerned the way in which GoCA members used the term ‘the community’. It appeared to be a term that carried weight and power within discussion and was used to strengthen and support viewpoints being made. Whilst the shortcomings of the PB process in terms of the community representation are acknowledged by the GoCA members, some members interchangeably spoke of the group as being ‘the community’:

*“... they were talking about getting the views of the community and we were saying we [GoCA group] know the views of the community and we [GoCA group] are the community.”*

GoCA member

It also became apparent during the thematic analysis that some GoCA members had far greater experience of business processes, engaging with public sector employees and being accountable for budgets than others involved:

*“... we’ve been involved in the housing, we are used to spending large sums of money so we are just kind of prioritising and deciding where the money is going, so we just do that, it’s not new for us.”*

GoCA member

Reference was also made by four focus group participants to the experience and ‘professionalism’ of other GoCA members and how these factors may have had an influence on the outcome of the PB process. Reference was made as to how the more ‘professionalised’ community member was perhaps more likely to put forth their funding proposal in a manner that was favourable to public sector workers:

*“That’s right ... how articulate you might be or how forceful you might be in terms of presentations ... would have a bearing on things [outcome of PB process].”*

GoCA member

Data gathered in the wider evaluation of the Govanhill test site add further weight to this point. Community professionalism was described by one public sector worker as being fundamental to effective engagement and was seen as a prerequisite for any community group to participate in decision making. It appears to be strongly connected with concerns regarding accountability and governance requirements:

*“it’s difficult, for me, I need to be able to say to my director, look this [hypothetical community group] is a constituted, competent group with terms of reference in place, it is run [and] chaired in a professional way – they are capable, representative community members who attend and they have the skills to use investment money and report back...through monitoring. Budgets are tight; I think people need to be confident that money will be used well within communities and I’m not sure that that belief is held up there [within upper levels of organisational hierarchy].”*

Public Sector Worker

An interesting point in terms of the interaction and relationship between public sector workers and GoCA members through the PB process is that from the data analysed there appeared to be no involvement of local councillors in the PB pilot within Govanhill.

## 4.0 Discussion

The data analysis demonstrates that the PB pilot in Govanhill was a positive and valued experience for community members and public and third sector workers alike. The scale of the pilot in Govanhill is relatively small, similar to that of Community Grant PB seen elsewhere in the UK. Importantly the Equally Well money used in the PB pilot represents a separate, additional resource available within Govanhill and has not come through local public sector budgets. To this end the study does not further understanding in relation to the opportunity costs and the cultural and structural barriers facing the mainstream (or top-slicing) roll out of PB. The pilot has however illuminated some important challenges concerning the implementation of PB and the realisation of some of the central pillars of the current and emerging political discourse, such as localism, transparency, pluralism and voluntarism. The learning from Govanhill is not only of local importance but also of national relevance.

The Govanhill PB pilot resonates powerfully with the Christie Commission's recommendations, notably its core themes of devolved decision making and collaborative gain to 'achieve more for less' amidst difficult economic times, challenging population demographic shifts and already stretched public sector services. The PB pilot in Govanhill may also add further understanding of practical ways to apply the asset based approach to health improvement.

### 4.1 Summary of main findings

Findings from the present study support the asset based approach: GoCA members demonstrated many capabilities and wholeheartedly embraced the responsibility afforded to them through the PB process. Furthermore the group demonstrated a thoughtful, nuanced and strategic approach to the use of the PB funds.

The PB programme in Govanhill funded four projects which were diverse, arguably abandoning the local status quo, but had a common theme in that they placed strong emphasis on 'making a difference to community members' lives'. Within Govanhill the PB process has augmented relationships between community members, public sector and voluntary sector workers, and has fostered increased trust, respect and reciprocity. The role of the voluntary sector was deemed vital in facilitating this enhanced dialogue and indeed the entire PB process.

The perceived time pressure imposed on the PB process was detrimental to the GoCA group's ability to widen community participation and representation in the pilot. It is unclear from the data gathered the exact source of this time pressure. However the perceived time pressure raises questions as to the clarity of the pilot's scope and vision from the outset. The present study suggests that achieving 'community representation' within local democratic processes is an enduring and contentious challenge in Govanhill. The positive findings of the PB pilot as well as the negative impact of the time pressure on the PB process, the importance of clarity, vision and communication and the challenges of community representation have already been reported in the PB literature.

Some GoCA members expressed concern that the PB process was 'too transparent' – perhaps stifling some members' democratic participation in the open decision making forum for fear of jeopardising their own proposal. Analyses also highlight the apparent desire for community 'professionalism' within interactions between local residents and the public sector. This desire for professionalism appears linked to public sector

concerns over accountability and governance within devolved decision making. The latter two findings and their implications for transparency and representation within PB processes are not widely reported in the PB literature, raising important areas for investigation and discussion in future research.

## **4.2 Relevance of findings**

### **4.2.1 Mobilising assets: localised responses to locally defined priorities**

The GoCA group demonstrated an in-depth understanding of the issues affecting Govanhill and were innovative, responsible and strategic in the use of the PB funds. These findings endorse the current asset based discourse. The present study demonstrates how effective PB processes make obvious and utilise the abilities, experience, knowledge and potential within communities. PB can initiate a purposeful and structured connection between the public sector, third sector and local residents thus further building the capacities and skills of all concerned. PB also facilitates community connectedness and social capital. The Govanhill PB pilot also demonstrates the role PB could play in the implementation of the localism agenda. Through PB, local community residents are able to democratically define local priorities and develop localised responses.

The funding decisions made by the GoCA group are in line with research supporting a move away from place-based interventions towards more individualised, people-orientated responses<sup>57</sup>. Lessons from neighbourhood regeneration schemes in the UK over the past five decades are, in the main, not encouraging<sup>58</sup>. The general view is that despite repeated regeneration and interventions, disadvantaged communities tend to remain disadvantaged<sup>59</sup>. The criticism of what has gone before is that much of the regeneration effort has prioritised surely the most malleable component of any community – the physical environment. Although the built environment, not least quality housing, is fundamental to health and wellbeing, it is clear that the focus on physical interventions does little to address the full spectrum of disadvantage and inequalities.

The central theme of people-based responses evidenced in the PB funded projects fundamentally allows disadvantaged Govanhill residents to lead richer lives. Positive social interactions within an accessible, valued and trusted local venue, free respite and relaxation for particularly troubled families, increasing realisation of fundamental human and legal rights within particularly vulnerable indigenous and migrant groups and the overall reduction of persistent and opportunistic organised criminality are all at the core of the PB projects decided on by the GoCA members. Interestingly the funded projects represent a mix of support and enforcement ideologies. The interim findings from the Govanhill test site describe how public sector partners have tended to have divergent opinion as to the most appropriate response within Govanhill, advocating either support *or* enforcement approaches<sup>7</sup>.

### **4.2.2 Voluntarism, pluralism and the challenge of ‘community representation’**

Voluntarism as an ideology has been significantly elevated within recent political discourse. The engagement of (or reliance on) communities in both shaping and potentially delivering public services is endorsed within current UK and Scottish policy. This and other studies demonstrate the role PB can play in promoting voluntarism; encouraging local residents to give of their time, energy and skills within the community. PB has proven an effective method of engaging and involving local

residents in defining local priorities as well as shaping and delivering localised services and projects. Crucially, PB has been shown to enhance voluntarism within communities which have been viewed as 'hard-to-reach'.

Community representation is a continual challenge facing any PB programme and is an important consideration within the discussion of pluralism and the emerging political and policy landscape. Pluralism in its broadest sense means the representation of a diversity of views perhaps in opposition to one, singular view or approach; within 'classical pluralism' the singular view is that of the government. The local application of classical pluralism means effective community engagement is vital in order to represent the diversity of opinion within communities and the diversity of communities themselves. An enduring question within pluralism is how best to distribute power and influence within the political process. This and other studies and literature demonstrate the potential of PB as a localised democratic mechanism to distribute power and influence within communities.

Findings of the present study outline the complexity relating to the local application of pluralism and the difficulty of satisfying all partners' expectations of what a 'representative' community group should look like within Govanhill. There are important considerations here both locally and nationally.

First it is important to recognise that no democratic process, either direct or elected, is ever perfect. Second, in a diverse and transient community such as Govanhill, it is unrealistic to expect that any group (of a manageable size) will ever be truly representative of the entire Govanhill socio-demographic strata. Whilst Govanhill is unusual, perhaps even unique in terms of its ethnic, socioeconomic and housing profile, these 'realities' of attaining 'community representation' should be recognised nationally. Based on this and other PB studies, all notions and expectations of community representation must be tempered with pragmatism and realism. To this end the challenge is perhaps to ensure that representativeness of community groups is continually reviewed and sought in the recognition it may never fully be realised. Importantly a perceived lack of representation should not be used as a reason to not engage with a developing community group.

Previous PB studies and evaluations suggest building in 'safeguards' to ensure realistic levels of community representation are achieved. One of the most often cited safeguards is to ensure that the 'loudest' community members do not appear to speak on behalf of the majority. Caution is required to ensure that this safeguard is not interpreted as meaning that vocal, passionate and engaged community members must be unrepresentative of disadvantaged areas. Given PB's redistributive roots, current approaches to its implementation perhaps need to examine whether this 'safeguard' is based on an inherent assumption that individuals experiencing the highest levels of disadvantage and inequality are homogenous in their inability to be vocal and engaged; this stereotyping hardly represents a community asset based approach.

The asset based approach to health improvement supports building on and developing community capacity and skills in order to more effectively participate in local decision making on an equal platform with public sector organisations. Evidence from the present study supports a view that public sector workers value or prefer 'professionalised' community members. Evidence within the Govanhill PB pilot suggests that this preference is associated with a belief that governance and accountability mechanisms are not easily implemented through PB and that they are more likely to be adhered to by professionalised community members. The PB literature reviewed suggests that this belief is incorrect: the principles of governance, transparency and accountability are fundamental within PB and are described as being



of equal importance as PB's founding values of devolved decision making and empowerment. This perception that governance is difficult or missing within PB may represent an important barrier to its mainstream implementation and acceptance.

The public sector is going through a period of unprecedented change. Whether public sector organisations are willing, or are forced (as a matter of fiscal necessity) to change it is important that, in embracing the localism agenda, the majority of change is not exclusively placed at the feet of the community. The preference for community 'professionalism' evidenced in this study may represent a largely unarticulated barrier to engagement and participation for many community members, particularly those from a non-professional background. A seminal PB paper from Brazil reports a similar observation. Santos describes how as PB is mainstreamed and becomes less radicalized, the identities of its participants may become more 'professionalised':

*'...common citizens will gradually be replaced by specialised participatory citizens'*

Santos concludes that this acculturation is an unavoidable dilemma of the PB process which has implications for representativeness<sup>60</sup>.

A further consideration when initiating PB programmes is that public sector organisations must avoid investing PB funds or other localism enhancing funds with the most convenient or 'readily available' community groups. The model adopted by the GoCA group, where existing community groups have nominated a representative to join GoCA, appears a progressive and worthy initial approach to community participation and representation, yet it has its limits. Indeed the GoCA group members openly recognise their need to increase representation and are actively pursuing widening participation. The public sector has a responsibility to support community groups involved in participative approaches. This means building skills and capacity where required but also supporting efforts to increase community representation.

It is interesting that the PB process in Govanhill did not directly involve local councillors. The role of local elected members in PB has been questioned by some, suggesting that PB's direct democratic mechanisms would erode the role of councillors<sup>61</sup>. However evaluation evidence from Brazil and England suggests otherwise<sup>62</sup>. This evidence states that in the interaction between localism, pluralism and voluntarism and mainstream service planning the councillor role can come to the fore. Within the Govanhill pilot, greater local councillor involvement might have been helpful in enhancing community representation and in further bridging the ideological gap between GoCA members and public sector workers. An engaged councillor may also have been important in championing this pilot and in paving the way for more PB approaches in Govanhill and Glasgow City.

#### **4.2.3 Enhancing transparency within local democratic processes**

One of PB's core values is transparency. There is much literature which demonstrates that effective mainstreaming of PB could significantly enhance public sector transparency, accountability and value for money. That said, even smaller Community Grant based PB may increase transparency through the closer and more reciprocal relationships it can foster between public services and communities.

The present study highlights that aside from the underpinning ethos of transparency within PB there are important practical considerations relating to transparency within the implementation of the PB process itself. Within the Govanhill pilot the proposal

hearing, discussion and decision making took place in an open forum. This proved to be counterproductive to the participation process for some GoCA members. This finding suggests that the traditional ballot box adopted in the early days of PB in Porto Alegre is perhaps still the best approach to voting within PB. This however does little to address the barriers to objective discussion reported from some GoCA members who did not wish to 'jeopardise' their own applications. This point merits further reflection as it may represent an important threat to the democratic and inclusive ethos of PB.

The issue of transparency was also raised in the focus groups in relation to 'off table lobbying' and whether this could potentially threaten the democracy and transparency of the PB process. It is worth stating that there was no evidence of this lobbying in the PB process within Govanhill.

As was the case within the Govanhill PB pilot, community groups may need support from public and third sector workers when developing PB funding proposals. To this end, a pragmatic suggestion may be to establish 'PB surgeries' where public and third sector staff resource is available to support community members and groups in developing PB proposals. It may also be worthwhile to set boundaries within the PB process where applicant groups are only able to make contact with public sector fund holders through these surgeries. These surgeries may increase the transparency of PB processes and reduce the potential for 'off table lobbying'.

### **4.3 Strengths and limitations of the present study**

Within this study, the use of qualitative methods allowed the exploration in detail of participants' and stakeholders' perceptions of the PB pilot and the wider influences on the process adopted. The study was limited to regular GoCA attendees and did not therefore include the views of wider Govanhill residents. The sample size of the primary data source (focus groups with GoCA members) was small compared to that for quantitative studies (17 participants took part in two focus groups). However the focus group data proved sufficient for analysis to achieve saturation, with similar issues arising in both focus group discussions. The rigour which was applied to the thematic analyses adds weight to the findings. The analysis involved two analysts in an attempt to reduce interpretive bias. The findings and discussion sections are presented primarily in a conceptual manner, raising both theoretical and practical considerations, and as such should be generalisable to other PB initiatives.

## 5.0 Conclusions

Empowerment is not an entity which can simply be created. Arguably, the empowerment of one group means the disempowerment of another. PB is a mechanism which promotes community empowerment; shifting power from the state to the people. A move from the current curtailed forms of PB seen in Scotland so far towards mainstream PB is an ambitious step and would require strong leadership. This step can only be taken when the collaborative gain that can be achieved by working with communities is recognised, accepted and evidenced. A pressing need facing The Big Society, the Localism Act, The Christie Commission, the assets discourse and the development of PB is therefore to develop a common understanding of what constitutes 'evidence' within these reform and policy agendas.

Analysis of key UK and Scottish social policy in the present study suggests that there is widespread support for community empowerment and for enhanced localism, transparency, pluralism and voluntarism. The drivers of this renewed interest in devolved decision making are contested by some. Irrespective of this debate there can be little disagreement that presently more needs to be achieved for less with already stretched services and a diminishing public sector purse. Discussions surrounding practical and realistic ways to realise localism and apply asset based approaches are at an early stage. Based on this and other studies, PB could be a central instrument in implementing these agendas.

So where next for PB in Scotland?

Learning from the Govanhill PB pilot suggests that the process was a positive and beneficial experience for all concerned. Furthermore PB is a well established, well researched and internationally recognised localised democratic mechanism. The present study demonstrates that PB can directly mobilise human community assets; promoting collaborative working and enabling devolved decision making and community empowerment.

The current political and policy landscape appears to be crying out for a pragmatic tool which purports to achieve these goals yet it appears that much is still to be done to promote awareness and understanding of PB, and to raise confidence in devolved decision making about budget allocations.

## 6.0 Local recommendations

- ④ It is important in raising the profile of PB and building confidence in the process that the Govanhill pilot projects deliver on their objectives, adhere to governance requirements and demonstrate added value beyond normal public service delivery. To this end it is recommended that a follow up evaluation of the four PB funded projects is conducted in 2012.
- ④ Evidence from the wider Govanhill Equally Well test site evaluation indicates that Community Planning Partners have found community engagement in the area to be challenging. To this end, and by adopting a community asset based approach it is recommended that local community planning partners work with and alongside the GoCA group to widen its membership and increase its community representation.
- ④ The success of the current PB pilot is worth little if it is not used as a foundation from which to build a new era of community participation and empowerment in Govanhill. It is therefore recommended that Community Planning Partners discuss the possibility of pooling 1% of the investment budget already allocated for use in Govanhill for use in a second phase of PB in 2012/13. This 1% approach is line with the PB Unit's target for mainstreaming PB without compromising statutory service delivery.
- ④ If future PB is to be implemented within Govanhill or Glasgow City it is important to learn from this report, the learning from which should be considered in detail during the planning and development stage of any future local PB.

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