

Aspiring Communities Fund: an evaluation of community engagement and participatory budgeting within Gorbals

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Executive summary

This report presents learning from a short-term, qualitative, case study evaluation of community engagement and participatory budgeting (PB) delivered by New Gorbals Housing Association (NGHA) funded by the Scottish Government Aspiring Communities Fund (ACF) over 2018/19. The Scottish Government has set out a significant level of political, legislative and investment support for community empowerment, participation and the strengthening of local democratic processes. Participatory Budgeting (PB) has emerged as a principle approach alongside community engagement in achieving these goals and has gained significant traction and support across Scotland in recent years.

Despite the supportive landscape, a 2019 national evaluation of participatory budgeting in Scotland identified ongoing uncertainty as to how to expand and support the necessary increased community engagement and participation in local resource allocation decisions as part of the 'mainstreaming' of PB; achieving the Scottish Government and COSLA agreed a target of 1% of local authority budgets to be allocated to PB by 2021. It therefore, it remains a priority to learn from the realities and practicalities of implementing PB within communities and its related engagement activities; such as those in Gorbals and described in this report.

Gorbals is an area of Glasgow, just south of the River Clyde and is a diverse and vibrant community. It has undergone significant regeneration over the years and the physical environment, housing, infrastructure and economic circumstances have been greatly improved in recent decades. Despite this, however, a range of social, economic and health inequalities persist.

Characteristics of the Gorbals population such as high rates of older people, ethnic minority groups, disabled people, young people not in education, employment or training, lone parents and householders living alone shape access, participation and engagement with community activities.

The community engagement and PB delivered by NGHA closely align with the vision of the ACF; the learning from which can support application and investment elsewhere. Over the reporting period, NGHA staff and partners engaged with 1,300 local residents as part of 'Gorbals Speaks', an ongoing initiative to inform the area's locality plan. NGHA staff also strengthened relationships with existing community groups and organisations and worked with local people to respond to the issues they raised (such as poverty, isolation and integration). In addition to this engagement work, three new PB processes were delivered. This involved administering £35,000 which funded 38 community projects developed by 26 community groups and individuals. This engaged approximately 500 residents within the PB voting process alone.

From the data collected it was evident that community members had high regard for NGHA community engagement and PB staff. In particular, community members valued their supportive and facilitative skills in 'connecting and signposting' within the community. NGHA staff worked hard to develop a rapport with community members, who in turn, appreciated the attention that NGHA staff paid to develop relationships within the community, alongside their flexibility and responsiveness.

The PB community panel members emphasised the importance of dialogue and deliberation and the challenge of reconciling diverse community views and opinions on the priorities and aspirations for

the area in the spend of limited PB budgets. Both NGHA and panel members were clear that this requires strong facilitation, learning, compromise and in-depth discussions within the community – and as Gorbals residents they had a central role to play in this.

The funded community engagement and PB projects were diverse, responding to the needs and aspirations of a wide variety of community voices. Underpinning the funded projects were ambitions of improving health and promoting mental wellbeing. This was undertaken through the specific projects supported and funded, as well as the process; by bringing community members together and enhancing social networks during the community events held throughout the year.

The community engagement and PB processes developed by NGHA staff in Gorbals sat on a foundation of authentic trusting relationships which helped enable effective support for community members involved in PB and wider capacity building, engagement and service delivery. A concise, pragmatic PB application process was a strength, as was the transparency within the process which was based on consistent communication throughout.

The Participatory Budgeting Officer (PBO) supported the PB community panel in linking local implementation issues to national policy. This helped the panel to understand the potential of PB, and to begin to think about what ‘mainstream’ PB might look like both nationally and in the Gorbals.

NGHA is extremely well placed to deliver further community engagement and PB processes within Gorbals, based on its long-standing role as a community anchor organisation and its demonstrable success in achieving effective engagement. The approach taken by NGHA and the community engagement and PB journey in Gorbals is of national relevance and would benefit from longer term evaluation.

Amid the uncertainty around the process of ‘mainstreaming’ PB and the predominantly technocratic narratives (led by technical considerations which can shift power to forms of policy expertise) surrounding what PB could look like in Scotland, the approaches developed by the PBO represent a timely reminder that fundamentally community engagement, empowerment and co-production are about people, communities, and relationships. Value must therefore be attached to the human characteristics among engagement staff such as empathy, patience, humility and kindness, alongside their professional and technical skills.

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Introduction

Community engagement, empowerment and participation have become central pillars in Scotland's social policy landscape in recent years¹. Community engagement is the process of building reciprocal working relationships between communities, community organisations and public services in order to prioritise and act upon community needs and ambitions². The Christie Commission report (2011), Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, and National Standards for Community Engagement (2016) are key documents that set out substantial political, legislative and practical support for community engagement³⁻⁵.

Over the past decade the profile and implementation of participatory budgeting (PB) has increased rapidly in Scotland⁶. PB is becoming one of the main methods used in community engagement, empowerment and participation. Originating from Brazil in the late 1980s, the roots of PB lie in addressing inequality and promoting social justice. PB is a democratic process of directly involving community members in deciding how to spend public money. Effective PB is tailored to specific community contexts but always begins with community engagement. PB should involve significant deliberation among community members, community organisations and public services followed by a method of democratic community voting on priority issues or projects to be funded⁷.

We have published a range of outputs in relation to PB and community engagement⁸. Our research and evaluation in these areas has informed both policy and practice and has been collaborative; working with communities, community groups and anchor organisations and a range of service delivery and academic partners. Our outputs are designed to inform the processes of engagement, empowerment and participation as a means of enhancing regeneration and community-based approaches to improve health and address inequalities.

This report summarises the key details and learning from an evaluation of community engagement and PB undertaken by New Gorbals Housing Association (NGHA)⁹ as part of the Aspiring Communities Fund (ACF). The ACF is supported by the European Social Fund and the Scottish Government and is designed to support and enable community bodies and third sector organisations within disadvantaged areas to develop long-term solutions to address local priorities and needs, to increase engagement and inclusion and to reduce poverty¹⁰. ACF funding was awarded to NGHA to fund two posts to support such activities within Gorbals – a Community Engagement Officer and a PB Officer. We were commissioned to undertake an independent evaluation of their work.

Despite the supportive landscape for community engagement, empowerment and participation, a 2019 national evaluation of Scotland's PB identified ongoing uncertainty as to how to expand and support the necessary increased community engagement and participation in local resource allocation decisions as part of the 'mainstreaming' of PB; achieving the Scottish Government and COSLA agreed a target of 1% of local authority budgets to be allocated to PB by 2021¹¹. Therefore, it remains a priority to learn from the realities, practicalities and benefits of delivering effective community engagement to support the implementation of PB within communities. This report addresses these issues and is designed to support and inform policy-makers and practitioners working in this field.

Gorbals – a place of dynamic regeneration, planning and community development

The Gorbals is a community on the south bank of the River Clyde in Glasgow which has, since the post-war period, experienced significant levels of regeneration. Gorbals is an area with a rich history and diverse heritage. The built environment and profile of the community has evolved markedly over the last few decades¹². The heavy industry and job opportunities within Glasgow in the late 19th century attracted several thousand migrant and immigrant workers to Gorbals. By the 1930s the population of the wider Gorbals district was estimated to be almost 100,000 residents. This gave the area a very high population density of around 40,000 people per square km¹³.

The overcrowding at that time within Gorbals coupled with high levels of poverty and poor public amenities led to significant social problems, such as gang culture, addictions and violence. As a result, Gorbals was often described as a “slum”¹⁴. The poor physical landscape, economic conditions and social fabric of the Gorbals community led to a major redevelopment programme being initiated in the 1950s in which the traditional tenement housing layout was largely demolished and replaced with socially rented, high-rise, concrete tower blocks, such as the Hutcheson Estate¹⁵.

High-rise developments are generally derided today as forms of public housing, not least for their direct association with social exclusion and segregation¹⁶. They were, however, at that time considered an improvement on the overcrowded conditions that preceded them. By the 1980s, due to poor management and lack of maintenance and investment, these tower blocks developed structural issues and further social problems became evident among the residents. Some of the high-rise tower blocks were entirely evacuated due to chronic levels of damp. This left large derelict structures and communal spaces which scarred the environment¹². As was the case in the pre-war era, Gorbals residents experienced poor health, a degradation of social ties and reduced economic prospects.

Glasgow City Council initiated a transformative redevelopment scheme for Gorbals in the 1990s, known as the Crown Street Regeneration Project¹². The Council’s approach was innovative at the time in that it clearly recognised the interdependence of physical, economic and social components within the regeneration design. Progressive and inclusive planning techniques were used, such as master-planning, competitive design tendering and significant community engagement and consultation. The transformative effect on the area has been previously reported¹². The design included a social mix of housing, the introduction of pedestrian environments and accessible public spaces, and the creation of space for new businesses, social enterprises and employment opportunities. Residents have largely expressed satisfaction with both the area and homes¹⁷. Despite these improvements, Gorbals continues to experience a range of social, economic and health inequalities in comparison with Glasgow City averages and Scotland overall¹⁸.

In addition to these inequalities, there are aspects of the diverse community demographic and social fabric of life in Gorbals which prioritise local, collaboratively developed approaches to enhance community engagement, local participation, access to services and social cohesion. Gorbals has higher rates of older people, ethnic minority groups, disabled people, young people not in education, employment or training, lone parents, householders living alone, overcrowded housing and people living in income deprivation¹⁸. While important, these insights are drawn from statistical sources only and do not capture the lived experience of life in Gorbals, nor do they reflect the

amount of time and energy service providers and community members are investing to improve local circumstances and opportunities.

NGHA has delivered significant community engagement and participation activity over the past three decades. The next section of this report describes their wider role as a 'community anchor' organisation within Gorbals. The current implementation of community engagement and PB within Gorbals is important in shaping community projects and initiatives and in promoting empowerment and participation. However, it also represents an aspiration to avoid the 'top-down' regeneration that characterised the Hutchesontown high-rise development.

New Gorbals Housing Association

NGHA was established in 1989 by local residents and is a forward-thinking housing association whose management committee is made up entirely of local residents¹⁹. In its three decades of existence, NGHA has been a focus and driver of much of the transformative change seen in the area, investing over £180 million in the provision of quality housing. At present the association owns and manages 2,500 homes for rent in Gorbals and factors a further 1,600 privately owned properties.

In recent years the association has broadened its role and its reach has expanded. NGHA is now the central 'community anchor organisation' within the area bringing together partner agencies in a collective effort to more effectively tailor their service delivery to the needs and aspirations of the community. NGHA was instrumental in establishing the Gorbals Regeneration Group in 2011 to develop and co-ordinate local regeneration activity. The group is chaired by a local elected member and is attended by the local community planning partners including third sector and community organisations. The group is supported and administered by NGHA²⁰.

In August 2013, Gorbals became one of the first three 'Thriving Places' in Glasgow. Thriving Places was a new place-based initiative adopting an asset-based approach (an ethos which recognises and builds on a combination of the human, social and physical capital that exists within local communities)²¹. The initiative was established by Community Planning Partners as part of the Single Outcome Agreement for Glasgow²². Through Thriving Places, NGHA formally became the anchor organisation with responsibility for co-ordinating the local partners, engaging the third sector and the community, and driving action, local regeneration and renewal²⁰.

In recent times the Gorbals community, supported by NGHA has been host to many initiatives and interventions with broad remits of promoting community cohesion, participation, empowerment and wellbeing. 'Spirit of the Gorbals' is one such project where local partners, co-ordinated by NGHA successfully applied for funding as part of the Glasgow Commonwealth Games legacy²³. Finishing in December 2017, the initiative involved a community panel comprising local residents to oversee the distribution of the budget informed by the ideas and aspirations of community groups and local people in Gorbals.

The successful ACF application enabled NGHA to recruit two full-time members of staff – a Community Engagement Worker and a Participatory Budgeting Officer (PBO) adding resource and expertise to NGHA's Communities Team. These staff have built upon and further developed a range of existing community-based initiatives as well as developing and embedding the PB processes.

Purpose and aims

The purpose of this paper is to report on recent community engagement and PB activities within the Gorbals area of Glasgow City. These activities have been delivered through NGHAs as part of the Aspiring Communities Fund. The report is designed to inform and support local delivery of community engagement and PB and describes key developments in these areas including the learning from and reflections of delivery staff, as well as the views of some of the community members involved. The report also aims to support community-based public and third sector practitioners, community groups and community members when developing community engagement and PB approaches. The findings presented can be used to further local understanding of community empowerment, participation and local democratic practice.

The report also aims to increase local and national government level strategic awareness and discussion concerning community engagement and PB implementation and evaluation, and to support thinking as to 'best practice' and the impacts of the approach on participants and communities. In turn it aims to inform the development of policy which nurtures approaches like PB as part of the wider community engagement and empowerment agenda.

Approach and methods

The findings presented in this paper are based on learning from a short-term, qualitative, case study evaluation of community engagement and PB delivered by NGHAs as part of the Aspiring Communities Fund.

Measuring the effects of regeneration has always been a difficult task; causation between community engagement, participation and outcomes such as health and employment is difficult to evidence due to the wide range of variables and external influences which affect such outcomes. Assessing the impacts of social interventions and processes of community engagement and participation adds further complexity. Furthermore, impacts accruing from community-based, social approaches can accrue in a diffuse and unpredictable manner²³. Combined, these factors make measurement a costly, time-consuming, complex and imperfect process.

In response to these challenges, and with a short evaluation timescale, the community engagement and PB within Gorbals was treated as a stand-alone case study which deployed qualitative methods to gather evidence and engage a range of perspectives in developing an understanding of the process and related stakeholder reflections. As the delivery of community engagement and PB within Gorbals has been so interdependent, it is appropriate they are described as part of the same narrative.

Data gathered through interviews and focus groups with three delivery staff and 18 community members were recorded with written permission using a portable digital device and then transcribed verbatim by an external agency. In addition, notes were taken during meetings with delivery staff and community members, and documentary analysis of application and monitoring forms and internal reports was carried out. This constitutes the full dataset that was analysed. The analysis was thematic in nature and was undertaken by the authors in order to systemise and summarise the content of the data into a coherent narrative with distinct themes²⁵. Brief details of specific community engagement and PB projects supported and developed using the ACF are presented as short case studies within the report, as are anonymised quotes from community members to illustrate the points being made in the report narrative.

Findings

We found that NGHHA undertook and developed a range of community engagement and PB activities, processes and projects over 2018/19 using the ACF resource. The role of NGHHA as a well-established and trusted community anchor organisation has been instrumental in their success, particularly in promoting awareness of the PB processes and the various routes to community engagement that NGHHA has established over the last three decades.

Through the ACF resource, two full-time members of staff have been recruited by NGHHA to support the community engagement and PB processes – a Community Engagement Worker (CEW) and a Participatory Budgeting Officer (PBO), as part of NGHHA’s Communities Team. What has been clear from the outset and throughout is that these roles and their contributions within the Gorbals community have been perceived as important and valuable by community members:

“Not just saying this, [NGHHA staff] have made the world of difference, 100% [NGHHA staff] for us propelled the [PB project], she was the rocket fuel for the [PB project]. She got right in there and did it. And we’re grateful for that, massively grateful. So, take them out of it [NGHHA staff], we wouldn’t function. I can assure you, I wouldn’t function.”

Gorbals resident and PB funded project lead

The community engagement and PB delivered through NGHHA as part of the ACF has contributed well to the area’s wider regeneration and has enhanced opportunities for residents to get involved in and take ownership of some local activities and decision-making concerning their community. The funded projects have been varied, responding to a range of needs, community priorities and aspirations^A.

The successes and challenges within community engagement and PB will now be considered in more depth. What is presented here is not an exhaustive list of all activities undertaken by the ACF-funded roles; instead selected developments are highlighted to illustrate the key learning points.

As a community anchor organisation, NGHHA already has established community engagement mechanisms in place. However, NGHHA staff appointed through the ACF have enhanced community engagement and representation and broadened awareness of NGHHA’s wider role within Gorbals, beyond that of a social landlord. A wide range of activities have been carried out, usually in response to community requests for support in relation to the big issues affecting them such as food poverty, child poverty and social isolation. Three examples are included here.

Engaging minority ethnic families. The CEW identified a gap in service provision around English for Speakers of Other Languages classes (ESOL). It was clear there was an acute need for a service that was suitable for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers with young children. These groups were more likely to experience social isolation, exclusion and lack of integration than other groups. Language barriers coupled with a lack of affordable and suitable childcare were factors in this. After detailed consultation, it was deemed culturally important in the provision of ESOL classes that their children were close by when in childcare. Existing ESOL provision in the area was unable to accommodate this. After exploring various options, it became apparent that working in partnership with TASK Childcare (a local childcare provider) would offer both suitable childcare and the facilities

^A The website www.gorbalsideas.org.uk/projects contains an overview of all the funded projects resulting from the three PB process described in this report over the 2018/19 period.

for an on-site crèche. Glasgow Clyde College provided an ESOL tutor and the CEW worked closely alongside colleagues in NGHAs housing management and maintenance teams to identify potential learners. The provision of the ESOL classes in this culturally sensitive and inclusive way led to the class being over-subscribed. There are now four two-hour sessions a week, with 76 ESOL learners on the register. Feedback has been positive, with learners reporting that, as well as having developed strong reading, writing and speaking skills, they also feel a greater sense of confidence, wellbeing and social connectedness in Gorbals due to having attended the class. An additional point in the feedback from the ESOL learners was that they reported a greater degree of confidence in seeking out and accessing other services and opportunities for learning and growth.

"I have become more confident since this class and I can speak to anyone now. I was so scared before. I can go to the shops or the doctor with my baby. It makes me so happy."

"I have loved this class for making friends in the Gorbals – I didn't have them before. Now I can help my children who go to school with homework."

ESOL class attendees

School holiday programme. The Gorbals Locality Plan prioritises improved services for children and young people in response to the levels of child poverty and food poverty in the area. NGHAs CEW has planned and delivered services which seek to address both the causes and effects of child poverty in Gorbals. These provide opportunities for children to meet, play and interact during holiday periods, a time which many parents find difficult both financially and practically due to lack of affordable childcare and activities in the area. In addition to this, these services have provided a valuable opportunity to address acute food poverty that is experienced during school holidays, for those who would normally access free school meals. This provides a dignified, non-stigmatising response to child poverty and an alternative to emergency food provision. NGHAs CEW took the lead in coordinating successful joint funding bids between ten local organisations, bringing in a total of over £105,000 to the area. This collaborative approach avoided duplication and the services offered families a range of choices to meet their specific needs. Since this service has been developed, the feedback from children, parents, carers and families has been positive.

Gorbals Speaks. The first Gorbals Locality Plan (2017) stated that 'residents and organisations' should play a key role in 'developing and refining the plan'. The process of updating the Plan has taken place through a programme of continuous engagement, known as *Gorbals Speaks*. Throughout this process, NGHAs Communities Team has played a central, frontline role in collecting and systemising responses from engagement sessions held by both NGHAs and other local partners in a range of local venues. These included the local health centre, the local supermarket and at 'community breakfasts'. Residents considered their positive experiences of Gorbals, as well as what they would like to see change. Over this period of engagement, over 1,300 responses were collected, before being collated and presented by NGHAs CEW. The Locality Plan will now be amended to include activities and outcomes directly related to the main points raised by residents.

The community engagement work has in turn also served to strengthen community capacity among under-represented or even marginalised groups. For example, the 'Men's Shed' is a project supported at different intervals by each member of the NGHAs Communities Team, which has strengthened NGHAs links with adult males who may have been socially isolated. Through dedicated support from the CEW, the project team gained sufficient confidence to make a successful

PB application. As a result of this application the PBO was able to offer one-to-one mentoring to Office Bearers and support with governance and policies which in turn have led to the Community Co-ordinator acting as an advisor to the Management Committee.

Case study: Gorbals Men's Shed

Men's Shed projects are a global movement originating in Australia and can take many forms, however there are overarching aims of promoting wellbeing and social connections among men.

Gorbals Men's Shed is a PB-funded initiative that was set up by local male residents in March 2018. Prior to submitting a PB funding application the idea for the Men's Shed required significant support from the CEW to develop the idea and consider what would be needed to apply for PB funding and to constitute the group. The Shed has become a welcoming, safe place where men can make friends, learn new skills and be part of a community. The group have completely renovated disused railway arches in Gorbals and built a workshop and studio. The aspirations of Gorbals Men's Shed are high and building work continues at pace to develop a multi-purpose community space.

To date, three PB grants have helped the group provide services and activities for their members, including funding for tools and equipment, food and activities, and most recently to develop a health and wellbeing programme. Aside from the skills the men are developing within the group, they also socialise, cook and eat together including regular barbecues during the summer months.

Through woodwork and art projects and the process of redeveloping the railway arches, local men have forged friendships and have a collective sense of pride, purpose and identity. Community members involved describe the shed as being life changing; some participants previously having few social contacts within the community. Upon visiting the shed, and speaking to the men involved, we were struck by the vibrancy, authenticity and positivity that surrounds this initiative within Gorbals. Despite being a small project, Gorbals Men's Shed is an exemplar of how PB-funded community-based initiatives can align with Scotland's National Performance Framework, contributing to national outcomes including health, communities, culture and education. Furthermore, Gorbals Men's Shed embodies the Framework's values, operating with kindness, dignity and compassion.

Gorbals Idea Fund. An early milestone for NGHAs PBO in the development of PB was to support the transition from the 'Spirit of the Gorbals' panel towards the 'Gorbals Ideas Fund'. On reflection, the PBO views this transition as vital, as a challenge and an important success. Supported by Foundation Scotland and Commonwealth Games resources, the Spirit of the Gorbals panel was an established group of residents who made decisions concerning early PB initiatives in the area going back to 2015. Although the panel was functioning well, community participation and decision-making was limited to its members alone. The panel's way of working did not mirror the aspirations of the ACF nor NGHAs for far-reaching community engagement and participation, and the deepening of local democratic processes as a foundation for strong PB within Gorbals.

The PBO describes this period as a challenging time and recounted that there was resistance to change among some community members who formed the Spirit of the Gorbals panel. However, through continued discussion and visioning as to what PB in Gorbals could be, relationships developed, trust and reciprocity were formed, and new community members were recruited.

First PB process (May 2018). The first PB process undertaken by the newly established Gorbals Ideas Fund took place in May 2018, this focused the development of the group during this transition. Awareness-raising was achieved through NGHAs expansive network of residents and community groups and through newsletters, leaflets and face-to-face canvassing within the community. A total of 16 funding applications were received, and 121 residents voted at the PB event held within the St Francis Community Centre. Applicants had ‘stalls’ within a large room and interacted with community members who came to the event to participate in voting, to make them aware of the proposal and to try and garner support. In total, £10,000 was available and all 16 applications were funded. The funding used for the PB process has come from a combination of sources including the Health and Social Care Partnership, Scottish Government Community Choices and income generated through NGHAs scrap metal fund.

Second PB process (August 2018). A similar PB event was carried out in August 2018 and the PBO described the feeling of momentum building around PB in the area. Based on learning from the event in May 2018, the PBO and the Gorbals Ideas Fund Community Panel were keen to promote the PB voting event as having the feel of a ‘family fun day’ and a celebration of life within the Gorbals community and history. An underlying goal in this was also to create a sense of camaraderie among funding applicants, rather than a competitive atmosphere. Irrespective of the PB process taking place, the PBO and Community Panel were keen to promote the wider benefits of participation to funding applicants, the networking opportunity, awareness raising, the chance to sign-up community members to their services and organisations, as well as simply attending an energetic and positive local event. Once again £10,000 was available, a total of 14 applications were received and 136 community members participated at the event and voted.

The ongoing support provided by the PBO was also conducive creating a positive and welcoming atmosphere for the competitive process of PB and its associated voting. Participants and community members that we spoke to demonstrated a clear and consistent understanding of the PB process and did not speak negatively about the possibility of not getting funded. The support provided by the PBO was also a basis for forming relationships and a rapport within the community which further served to strengthen the PBO and Community Panel’s understanding of what issues community members wanted to prioritise and their reasoning for this. This was seen as positive by community members as they felt their ideas were being accurately represented within the PB process and in the application they submitted with support from the PBO:

“But the next round [of PB within Gorbals] that I’m going in to, I’ve got a good idea for stuff [PB funded projects], some really good ideas for this one. But the challenging things, I wouldn’t say there’s been any challenges, the whole process is put out really friendly. And, again, that reflects back out on the community aspect to it as well, because [NGHA staff] knows us, and the committee [Gorbals Ideas Fund] know us all, and the groups feel comfortable. Whereas I imagine some other application process you might feel a wee bit like “they might not really understand my idea, might not know where I’m coming from.” But this, when you’re putting that form in, you feel as if you’ve got a really good chance. And then the voting aspect to it, you know it’s going out to that. I’ve been to some meetings recently where it’s said “what if they don’t like what we’re doing?” Well, that’s the whole aspect to it. If they don’t like it, they don’t like it, tough...that’s what participatory budgeting is... that’s voting. If you don’t get what you’re asked, you might not get as much, you might get some. And then you’ve got the wee event day that you go to sell your idea, to put your display up, is really

good, because that gives you a chance. And whether you get it or not, that day's good as well because you get a chance to flag up what you're doing."

Gorbals resident and PB-funded project lead

Case study: Livingwell Clubs

There are three Livingwell Clubs based in Gorbals, providing weekly structured activities for older people living in sheltered accommodation. Through PB funding, the clubs have been able to significantly enhance the range of activities they can offer participants. PB funds have been used to purchase arts and crafts materials, games and equipment and to pay for some of the activities members themselves expressed a preference for, including tailored fitness classes and learning new languages.

The emphasis of the Livingwell Clubs is on participation, socialisation and enjoyment. However, it is evidenced that these types of activities can have profound additional benefits for older people in terms of promoting health, wellbeing, positive behaviours and even delaying the onset of cognitive decline. The extra structure that weekly activities provide in addition to their established routine also has positive benefits.

Third PB process (February 2019). The next PB process took place in February 2019 and the Gorbals Ideas Fund Community Panel decided the process should have a remit focusing on health; specifically, how PB can engage with community members who do not keep in good health. The group felt that by looking across the wide range of activities available to community members in Gorbals they might identify 'gaps' in provision for people with long-term conditions and for whom accessing services might be difficult. The group also utilised information and evidence available on their community to begin shaping some of the eligibility criteria. Interestingly this PB process represented the first occasion where a developing funding application was rejected during the initial eligibility assessment; with the group reflecting that the application did not meet the funding and sustainability criteria and eligibility. The panel also took the decision to increase the maximum funding award from £1,000 to £3,000 (although informal, non-constituted groups and individuals could apply for up to £500), in an effort to encourage applicants to think about potentially longer term and sustainable projects. A total of £15,000 was available and 18 applications were received. As the momentum and awareness around PB increased locally there was an increase in community engagement, with over 300 people attending the event, of which 230 people cast their vote.

PB Connect sessions. A strength of the PB processes in Gorbals has been the ongoing support provided by the PBO and the Community Panel. 'Connect' sessions were implemented where those projects awarded PB funds could get together with the PBO and Panel members to identify and discuss challenges and successes in implementation of the projects. These sessions offered practical support and advice such as identifying further funding sources, help with budgeting, completing monitoring forms and project management as well as identifying opportunities for skills development and training. The projects represented were predominantly delivered by community

members and they offered each other emotional support and encouragement. Community members consistently praised the quality of communication provided by the PBO; community members were well informed throughout the PB process, while communication, regular contact and support was also provided after funding had been awarded.

Strategic PB development. *The Gorbals Ideas Fund Community Panel* operates on a basis of action research and collaboration. Decisions are taken collectively as a result of facilitated discussions and with an emphasis on testing new ideas and ways of working to build participation.

In the early days of the Gorbals Ideas Fund, this focused on the development of basic PB processes and resulted in decisions such as including children and young people over eight years of age as voters. This decision was taken as the result of collective agreement that children and young people should have a say about the types of services and activities they want and need. Including children and young people over eight year old has allowed the NGHAs Communities Team to build links with this age group, sign-posting and referring to groups and activities, delivered by NGHAs and local partners.

Early decisions also ensured access for individuals and non-constituted, informal groups in recognition that local people often know what their community needs and good ideas don't necessarily always come from formal groups, projects and services. This decision has sparked a range of grassroots activity.

After the second community voting event in August 2018, the PBO was keen to support the Gorbals Ideas Fund and the wider community in developing a longer-term, more strategic approach to PB and to begin consideration of what the 'mainstreaming' of PB would mean to them. This required some 'space and time', during which the PBO delivered PB information sessions and peer education and research training to community members. The PBO was keen to encourage the community members to think of themselves as 'champions' of PB and to distil what key messages they would like to communicate to the wider community concerning PB in the area. Furthermore, the group took time to consider how they could expand and deepen the reach of community engagement involved in PB in the area. Key to the next iteration of PB within Gorbals would be to ensure that robust 'dialogue and deliberation' takes place to consider in detail and identify and negotiate the community's priorities, needs and aspirations. Ideally this dialogue and deliberation would involve community members alongside public and third sector colleagues.

The priority the PBO and the NGHAs Communities Team gives to dialogue and deliberation is mirrored within broader community engagement activity organised by the team. 'Community breakfasts' have been a successful approach where NGHAs and partners provide free cooked breakfast rolls to community members on two mornings every week within a well-used community setting. The initiative has been described as highly successful by community members who attend. The breakfasts bring significant numbers of community members together (on average around 100 community members attend each week), but crucially it is also well used by NGHAs staff and other service delivery agencies in the area – staff members do however pay for their own breakfast rolls. This approach enables community members, NGHAs staff and other services to sit down together and interact in a relaxed environment and talk about life and issues in the area. A number of referrals and linkages have been made through the community breakfasts to support community members in a variety of ways. The breakfasts also enable service providers and NGHAs staff to form a deeper understanding of the lived experience of Gorbals residents and allow community members to

develop an understanding of the wider role of NGHHA and other service providers in the area. Collectively this makes for a stronger foundation from which initiatives like PB can develop in the area.

A strategic consideration identified during the time of reflection undertaken by the Gorbals Idea Fund with the PBO was the issue of PB resource being used to bolster public services which have been subject to cuts; the group reflected on whether this is something the PB in Gorbals should be funding, despite it being identified as a priority by community members. For example, PB resource was awarded to the 'Gorbalites' community group to fund private community-based podiatry services for the general older population which was previously delivered by the NHS (at present the NHS delivers this service to populations with priority health conditions only). A consideration that the PBO has discussed with the group is therefore how these types of situations relate to social policy or not, and to support the panel in linking local implementation issues to national policy. This has helped the panel to understand the potential of PB, and to begin thinking about what mainstream PB might look like. The discussions have also highlighted the complications which are sometimes inherent in PB delivery such as the private sector delivering formerly public sector services such as illustrated by the podiatry case.

At this time the PBO also began inviting members of the Gorbals Idea Fund panel to attend PB development sessions with them, such as those hosted by [COSLA](#)²⁶ and [What Works Scotland](#)²⁷. This has enabled panel members to have a broader view of PB, to hear about examples from Europe and beyond and to reflect upon their own PB processes. The PBO described how attendance at these events energised panel members and invigorated their already strong sense of ownership over the PB processes in Gorbals. Perhaps the key message the panel members have taken from these sessions has been the importance of dialogue and deliberation and the challenge of reconciling diverse community views and opinions on the priorities and aspirations for an area in the spending of limited PB budgets. Both the PBO and panel members are clear that this requires strong facilitation, learning, compromise and in-depth discussions within the community, and as Gorbals residents they have a central role to play in this.

Gorbals residents who took part in the PB funding proposals spoke positively about the application process developed by the PBO and the Community Panel. It was described as less technical and jargonistic than other grant applications that the community members had had experience of. Furthermore, the overall process was described as "straight forward" and "transparent". The communication and support offered by the PBO and the Community Panel throughout the process were also cited as factors promoting the success of the PB processes:

"If you want to get support, there's always support there as well. From other groups, and people like [NGHHA staff] and that as well from the Gorbals Idea Fund, they're always there if you need them. She's good [NGHHA staff member]. Sometimes I think with other funding we've found out about, the application process for one is really user friendly, because I've done stuff, we put in for things, and you just look at the application and it puts you off straight away. Because even the terminology that's used, you think "what does that word mean? I need to Google that word before I even sign it." But the application process for this PB in the Gorbals is so user friendly."

Gorbals resident and PB funded project lead

Discussion

Scotland has broad social policy aims of empowering and energising communities and transforming and strengthening the relationship between community members, civil society organisations and all levels of government and public service. PB and its associated engagement with and empowerment of communities fits well within Scotland's current policy landscape.

Since its inception in the late 1980s, PB has gained international recognition for its potential for deepening democratic processes, and advancing social justice priorities, by involving communities in deciding how to spend public funds. At its core, PB is about allocating public money to support services and initiatives that matter to local people. However, these outcomes of PB are not achieved simply by implementing processes – the way in which PB is developed and implemented is vital. This includes building on and working alongside existing community resources including anchor organisations and established local community engagement structures. The characteristics and attributes of PB delivery agents are also important as is their ability to foster productive relationships within communities.

Scotland has shown commitment to PB in recent years with ever increasing numbers of PB processes taking place throughout the country. At present there is a strong policy, legislative and investment framework from which to embed PB across Scotland. This represents an important juncture from which to consider the characteristics of effective PB processes that have taken place to date, and how they relate to, or can influence the 'mainstreaming' of PB.

Anchor organisations. Based on the work of NGHA described in this evaluation there are some key local points of learning which may inform policy concerning both PB and community engagement. Community anchor organisations are of course varied across Scotland but offer local insights, knowledge and connections that act as important conduits between community members and local government and the public services they provide.

Anchor organisations have an important role in promoting and developing local examples of 'co-production'. The relationship and power dynamic between professionals and community members in co-produced projects is reoriented in order to work together in identifying local priorities and developing local services and projects. Although co-production is an enduring and central principle within the Christie Commission, Community Empowerment Act and National Standards for Community Engagement, there is little evidence of its widespread application at a societal level. This may be due to a lack of evidence or applicable implementation principles.

Relationships and communication within PB. In this regard, local working such as the PB and community engagement described in this report can be important to realising Scottish Government ambitions to create communities which are inclusive and empowered. Based on the approaches of NGHA staff, what appears to be important on the ground within co-production and approaches like PB, is the willingness and ability to develop and foster trusted relationships within communities, to communicate consistently and effectively, and to make engagement and participation processes transparent and accessible for communities and citizens. In pragmatic terms this is only possible when the wider community engagement and capacity building components that, among other things, support PB are adequately resourced and have enough time, and when engagement staff demonstrate commitment and determination.

Interpersonal skills and characteristics of PB practitioners. From an organisational or societal perspective, a further consideration in attempting to replicate the successful community engagement and PB processes seen here in Gorbals, must be the value attached to interpersonal skills and characteristics among engagement staff, such as empathy, emotional intelligence, patience, humility and kindness alongside the professional experience and technical competence associated with PB and community engagement. This way of working feeds into strategic decision-making – for example the Gorbals Speaks exercise has given a clear community voice in the review of the Gorbals Locality Plan. NGHAs staff have demonstrated these qualities and this has been central to the successful PB and community engagement activities in Gorbals.

A holistic approach. Amid the uncertainty and predominantly technocratic narratives surrounding what mainstream PB and co-production might look like in Scotland, the PB and community engagement described in this report represent a timely reminder that such approaches must be holistic and are fundamentally about people and communities, and aimed at enhancing lives and addressing inequalities. Crucial to embodying these values is the quality and authenticity of relationships, communication and accurate representation of communities that can be fostered through engagement between anchor organisations, public services, all levels of government and citizens. Such approaches, alongside the housing developments, economic regeneration and infrastructure investment in Gorbals act upon important determinants of health and wellbeing within the area. Collectively such holistic regeneration and community services and initiatives shaped by a strong community voice represents a marked and progressive shift away from the approaches of the past.

Limitations of the research

This report presents the findings of a short-term evaluation deploying only qualitative methods. While the evaluation engaged a range of stakeholder and community perspectives, the data collection was limited by time and resource. For example, the views of the wider community were not gathered, instead only insights from community members involved in the community engagement process or recipients of PB funding were recorded. This therefore limits the range of perspectives represented in this report. The analysis of data collected was rigorous and benefited from the authors discussing and comparing emergent themes and coding. However, the analysis was limited in scope and again curtailed by time pressures. The focus of the evaluation was on process learning and the timescales and resources precluded any consideration of quantitative impact at either an individual or community level.

Recommendations

Focus on dialogue and deliberation. The Gorbals Ideas Fund and the PBO have indicated that the next iterations of PB within the area should prioritise dialogue and deliberation within the processes to be developed. We recommend that links should be made with public and third sector services to be part of the dialogue and deliberation. This is because other PB processes from around the world have demonstrated the potential of dialogue and deliberation in fostering genuine co-production and in generating new and invaluable insights and priority actions for everyone participating. This represents an important step as PB is rolled out nationally. If the PB process were to have a theme (such as early years, greenspace or transport) this may make it clearer which public and third sector services would benefit most from joining the dialogue and deliberation with communities. Successful dialogue and deliberation requires strong facilitation and a clear commitment to equitable and meaningful participation from all taking part.

Maintain equalities focus. NGHA has demonstrated a clear commitment to ensuring that PB within the area is inclusive and accessible for residents. This should be an enduring priority for PB within Gorbals. There may be merit in establishing a Gorbals PB equalities group that might meet quarterly to support and advise the ongoing PB work in the area on issues of inclusion and access among often-excluded communities of interest and identity who face significant and multiple barriers to participation. This group could comprise diverse community representatives and specialist equalities agencies – who may provide additional insights around equitable engagement and participation in PB.

Embedding evaluation. The learning from local PB processes can be influential. If possible, longer-term evaluation resource, or at the least the application of a self-evaluation framework such as that described in our previous report²⁸ should be built into the next iterations of PB and community engagement within Gorbals.

Recognition of the importance of relationships within effective PB and community engagement. National agencies and local authorities tasked with embedding PB within service delivery should be aware of one of this report's key messages – that the planning and implementation of PB requires strategic and technical competence but also an ability to form reciprocal, trusted and respectful relationships between service providers and community members. PB is a process of sustained human interaction involving dialogue and deliberation, negotiation and compromise. As such, the interpersonal skills and characteristics of PB and community engagement delivery staff such as empathy, emotional intelligence and kindness should be valued and prioritised alongside their professional skills and experiences.

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