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Supporting best practice in community development

Mayfield and Easthouses Participatory Budgeting Event 21st May 2016

Scottish Community Development Centre

PB Scotland

Introduction

On Saturday 21st May 2016, 349 local residents in a disadvantaged area of Midlothian decided how to spend £30,000 on projects supporting people struggling financially. PB Scotland was there to capture the action.

A pensioners group, an army cadet platoon, a play therapy provider and a rural and urban training scheme - these are just four of the 31 diverse projects that applied to the *Mayfield and Easthouses Community Chest* participatory budgeting initiative which was organised by Midlothian Council and partners in spring 2016. The event was a huge success with 349 local people turning out to vote, with 17 local projects being successful in their bids to be funded.



Process

Engagement and participation were key from the start, with the event being planned by a steering group formed of council staff, community group representatives and support workers. The group discussed and formulated application criteria and promotional tools including posters, flyers, a social media profile and a slot on the local radio. A local Sure Start dads groups (was tasked with coming up with a name for the project and 'Mayfield and Easthouses Community Chest' was born.

| LIST OF APPLICANTS | |
|---|------------------|
| NAME OF GROUP (LISTED BY AMOUNT REQUESTED) | AMOUNT REQUESTED |
| Mayfield Church - Messy Church | 470.00 |
| Connecting Midlothian Socially | 520.00 |
| Mayfield & Easthouses Breastfeeding Support Group | 696.00 |
| Easthouses & Mayfield Pensioners | 750.00 |
| Midlothian Voluntary Association - Recovery Cafe | 810.00 |
| MAEDT - Job Club | 825.00 |
| 12 Platoon Army Cadet Force | 931.62 |
| Newbattle Handicapped Club | 1,100.00 |
| Men's Shed | 1,200.00 |
| St Bernard's Football Club | 1,263.48 |
| Mayfield & Easthouses Retired Miners | 1,300.00 |
| Mayfield Mothers and Toddlers | 1,653.93 |
| Mayfield PS Parent Council | 1,721.98 |
| 33rd Midlothian Scout Group | 1,846.00 |
| Easthouses Bowling Club | 1,930.00 |
| Play Therapy Base | 2,016.00 |
| Little Seedlings Play Group | 2,215.94 |
| St Lukes Parent Council | 2,217.80 |
| Mayfield and Easthouses After School Club | 2,259.75 |
| Midlothian Surestart - Dads Adventure Play Club | 2,410.00 |
| M & E Community Council - Gala Day Vouchers | 2,630.00 |
| Y2K - Growing Gardeners | 3,224.69 |
| Saltire Judo | 3,332.00 |
| Lawfield Junior Youth Club | 3,437.83 |
| Action Sports Centre / NHS | 3,658.50 |
| Midlothian Surestart - Dads Group | 4,018.00 |
| Lawfield PS Parent Council | 4,500.00 |
| MAEDT - Homework Club | 4,794.00 |
| Y2K - Early Link Service | 4,840.00 |
| Midlothian Association of Play | 6,411.00 |
| Rural Urban Training Scheme | 8,923.84 |

Information sessions were held in two community venues at different times of the day to enable as many people as possible to learn about the process. The sessions provided local groups with further details about the application and the PB process. In addition, the steering group targeted existing groups and ran an awareness raising campaign amongst local residents. Community members were able to receive support from Mayfield and Easthouses Development Trust to form new constituted groups and set up a bank account.

The seeds were sown for a successful event and, come the big day, Mayfield Church Hall was turned into a noisy, colourful throng of activity. Most of the 31 projects had set up stalls containing information, photos and, in some instances, things they had made. Many had encouraged members and friends to come along to support them, while organisers from the Council, with some help of local cadets, attracted passers-by to come inside.

Feedback

PB Scotland spoke to local people who had come along to vote who, in the main, were positive about the event. Anne and Meg (pictured), two retired friends, first heard about the event when a Council employee had visited their knitting club to inform members of what was happening. Both admitted they would be voting for the project they knew best - the Mothers and Toddlers - but they



had also had a chance to go around the room learning about projects they weren't aware of before. They added that the church was a perfect location for PB, given that people were familiar with it as a community venue, regularly hosting a range of activities and events.

Retired couple, David and Jane (pictured left), heard about the event at their local bowling club the previous night, and had also caught wind that something was happening on the local radio station. They

welcomed the simplicity of the PB process, and noted that they weren't used to attending public events normally. Although they were aware of some of the projects, which had helped them to decide to come along, they commented that it was hard to learn about so many projects at once.

The above interviews show that some participants were clearly, and understandably, more comfortable voting for projects they were familiar with. To address this, organisers included a second and third choice in the voting form. Tommy Goldie, Communities Officer at Midlothian Council explained that this encouraged participants to consider other proposals in addition to those they knew already, helping to make the process a fair one. Like others at the event, the PB process had been a real eye opener for Tommy, who told PB Scotland:

"It's been a really different process from what I'm used to as a council officer. I've had to put aside any priorities that I'd make and leave the decision making to the community".

Participating projects also had largely positive views of the PB process. Miriam Leighton from Midlothian Voluntary Action, whose Recovery Café project was bidding for funding, saw the process as another potential source of funding and also, given the high turn-out, a good opportunity to raise awareness of the recently-set-up Recovery Café. Staff from RUTS Build-a-Bike acknowledged that, as an organisation based outside the area, they were less likely to receive so many votes as local projects. However, they recognised the positive side to local people having the chance to vote for locally-led initiatives, and RUTS was also keen to take the opportunity to let more people know about the project.



Results

An impressive 349 local people voted in Mayfield and Easthouses Community Chest. 17 out of the 31 projects who applied to part of the process were successfully funded, with most being delivered by locally-based organisations. The full list of successful projects receiving a share of £30,000, is as follows:

- Newbattle Handicapped Club
- Lawfield Parent Council
- Army Cadets
- Little Seedlings Play Group
- After School Club
- St Lukes Parent Council
- Messy Church
- Easthouses and Mayfield Pensioners
- 33rd Midlothian Scouts
- MAEDT Job Club
- Easthouses Bowling Club
- Mothers and Toddlers
- Mayfield PS Parent Council
- Sure Start Dads Group
- Recovery Cafe
- Dads Adventure Play Club
- Breastfeeding Support Group



Learning

As with other PB events involving voluntary organisations, there was a sense that, although the process isn't perfect, there are many reasons why PB is a better way to decide on the funding of local projects than having council officials making most of the decisions. Mayfield and Easthouses Community Chest allowed for a transparent process and for local people to have more of a say in, and understanding of, how money is spent locally. As many involved reported, it also enabled community members and local projects to find out about each other, with the potential of further partnership and increased membership.

One of the main organisers, Paul Johnson, Communities Officer at Midlothian Council, felt that the large turn-out was mainly due to the heavy promotion and the chance to directly influence how money is spent. Money, for him, is a great hook on which participatory democracy can be grown. The council, he added, has developed stronger relationships with many groups as a result of PB, and groups who haven't been funded will still be supported to find other sources of funding. Moreover, Paul was clear that although nothing has been confirmed so far, the impact of Midlothian's PB will be evaluated to see if it is worth using more widely in the area.

[See more at Mayfield and Easthouses Community Chest Facebook page.](#)

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