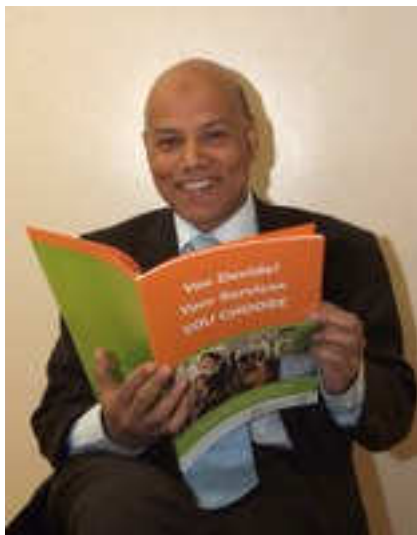


<http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/case-studies/you-decide-tower-hamlets-london>

You Decide!, Tower Hamlets (London)



The Tower Hamlets 'You Decide!' project began in January 2009. In the first four months we ran 8 events across which 815 residents spent almost £2.4 million. The money was from the central council budget and was spent on additional mainstream council services.

Overview:

At each event the residents who attended were informed about the services on offer, had an opportunity to deliberate about the services with other members of their community and then had the chance to decide which services should be purchased.

Subsequent to the events the Local Area Partnership (LAP) Steering groups - made up of residents, councillors and service providers – had a large say in how the service should be operated on the ground and also a role in monitoring that service going forward.

Although this project is still in its early days we hope that it will:

- Improve the perceptions and performance of local services
- Help develop the capacity for proper participation within the Tower Hamlets community
- Generate social capital

Organisation:

Tower Hamlets Local Strategic Partnership

Aims:

As is often the case when local authorities embark on a project of this sort there are a large amount of objectives and a lack of certainty over which of them can be achieved.

However, after our first year we have settled on the following priorities as the key reasons that we use a model of participatory budgeting:

- **To improve perceptions and performance of local services.** This is to be done by giving residents the power to design and choose services through the process and then shape those services through the Steering Groups.
- **To develop proper participation within the Tower Hamlets community.** This will help people, from all backgrounds, not only to get involved in this process but also to learn from the experience of how to participate. This should improve levels of involvement in other council services and generate a skill set around participation within the Borough.
- **To generate social capital.** This process will improve the level of involvement and engagement amongst Tower Hamlets residents in all walks of life, and not just in relation to council services. This includes the joining of voluntary organisations and local associations as well as encouraging involvement in Politics.

Where:

In Tower Hamlets we carried out our project across the whole Borough.

Tower Hamlets is a very urban Borough in the East End Of London. Despite being only about 5 miles across it contains nearly 220,000 people speaking 110 different languages. Nearly 50% of the population is non 'White British'.

The Borough is split into 8 Local Area Partnership (LAP) areas and it is these which formed the basis of the project. We held one event in each LAP and the LAP Steering Groups (made up of residents, councillors and service providers) have a particular role in monitoring and shaping the services that are provided in their local area. This makes the project both a Borough wide and a very local one at the same time.

How:

The Tower Hamlets participatory budgeting project was branded as 'You Decide!' and followed roughly this format:

1. The cabinet set aside £2.4 million to be spent on mainstream council services through a PB process. This money came from ordinary council funds.
2. The PB team asked for 'bids' for services that could appear on the 'You Decide!' menus. All services had to be mainstream council services. In addition they had to meet one of the five cabinet priorities or one of the LAP priorities identified by the LAPs over the past year. These services

were then presented to Cabinet before being put together in the menu. In total the value of the services on the menu was just under £750,000. Each LAP only had £280,000 so they would have to make real decisions. The menu items came under the categories of: 'Reducing Levels of Youth Unemployment', 'Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour', 'Raising GCSE results', 'Improving the Quality of the Public Realm' and 'Improving Cleanliness'.

3. We commenced an advertising campaign. This involved both 'above' and 'below' the line advertising. In other words we mixed traditional advertising techniques (such as adverts, press releases, posters and leaflets) with a more networked approach. This networked approach relied on councillors, members of the LAP Steering Groups and our Neighbourhood Management team reaching out to community groups, individuals and others and asking them to spread the word. Of the 815 people who attended there was a pretty even split between those who came because of our traditional communication and those who came because of word of mouth.
4. As people heard about the campaign they were encouraged to register for the 'You Decide!' events that were to follow. As people registered we took a full set of equalities data (all 6 strands). These were constantly monitored and if a certain equality strand was seen to be under-represented the Neighbourhood Managers would endeavour to reach out to these groups. This process wasn't perfect but it did lead to a fairly representative event, right across the equalities strands.
5. Then came the events. At each event we had capacity for at least 100 people. We therefore allowed in those who had pre-registered first and then allowed all others who had turned up in as well. Over the eight events 815 people attended.
6. The events were split into three sections:
 - a. Inform: This took two parts. Initially the co-chairs of the LAP Steering Group introduced the LAP priorities and why they were important for the local area. The service heads who would deliver the 33 services on the menu presented their services to the residents (As they were grouped under headings this meant only 3 senior managers would present at each event). The idea was to give information about the level of the problem, what services were already provided and what difference the additional funding would make. At the end of each presentation there would then be time for questions
 - b. Deliberate: When the people arrived they were asked to sit at tables around the room in a café style. Each table had a trained facilitator on it and during this part of the event the facilitator worked to encourage the residents to talk to each other about which services they favoured and why they considered them to be so important for their local area. Whilst this took place they also had some food which helped add a level of informality to the discussion.
 - c. Decide: We then moved to the voting stage. Each participant had a 'who wants to be a millionaire' style quizpad. In the first round of voting all participants were asked to vote for the service they considered to be most important. The item that received the most votes was purchased, the money for that item removed from the total and another round was opened. In each round the item with the most votes was purchased and this continued until all the money was spent. All votes were displayed on the Big

Screen as they happened (Chris Tarrant style) and the items purchased were shown on another big screen alongside the remaining choices and the total budget. This made the process instantaneous and very open.

7. After the events had been completed we invited all of the LAP Steering Groups (although only resident and councillor members could attend) and all of the services to an evening event we nicknamed 'service speed dating'. Each service was invited to bring along a rough outline of what they were planning to do with the money allocated to them (providing more detail than had been available at the events). The LAP Steering Groups could then negotiate with the services the sort of changes they would like to make. This led, at the end of the event, to a rough blueprint between each Steering Group and the services purchased in that area as to what was going to be delivered. Many of the services were changed quite considerably because of resident involvement and many of the Steering Group members welcomed this as a way of shaping services for their local area.
8. After this event the services had a mandate to go and deliver the services. Each month the services fill in a basic highlight report which is monitored by the central Strategy and Performance (S&P team. This is also sent to the Steering Groups who are invited to comment on the report/service and submit those comments to the S&P team. These reports are then passed to the Cabinet on a quarterly basis and reported on an exception basis.
9. We begin again.

NB: In 2010 we will begin the process with a priority setting consultation. This will help us ensure that the items that end up on the menus reflect the needs, interests and requirements of the local communities which will be voting on them. It will also help the PB process shape services beyond just the ones voted for at the events and actually have an influence on the total mainstream budget.

Who:

The project was run out of the Tower Hamlets Partnership (the LSP for Tower Hamlets) and involved projects from the police, the council and a couple of our contractors.

There was strong councillor buy in with the lead member for resources attending nearly every event and many local ward councillors attending the appropriate LAP event as well.

In addition to the service heads other service providing staff would attend the events and representatives from the police were present at every one as well.

In order to get enough facilitators to deliver eight events in a month we used facilitators from the PCT, the parent engagement teams, the THP and other service providers from within the council.

In addition, the Neighbourhood Management team had a large role in this process. As the key links to the community they spread the word about the events, ensured a large turnout of residents, liaised with the LAP co-chairs and have a large role in assisting the Steering Groups to monitor the services going forward.

What:

It is a little too early to identify definitive outcomes. The events were only in March and April this year and the services are just now starting to be delivered. However, we carried out an evaluation of the events as they happened and can make some initial judgements about the process.

- 815 people attended from across the borough. They were a diverse group of people and were fairly well spread geographically.
- 62.2% of attendees felt the process helped strengthen their level of influence over local services. Only 23.4% disagreed.
- 67.2% of attendees felt that the event was a good way to decide where money is spent on local services.
- 77.2% want us to do it again (only 11% do not).
- 60.5% felt that You Decide! will help to improve my level of satisfaction with my local area. (the majority of others were undecided)

We hope these numbers will all increase as the services are delivered and importantly as the LAPs see the influence they have over how the services are delivered.

The other area of achievement is around the service delivery itself and how these are shaped. It is difficult to illustrate exactly how the services will be shaped at this early stage. Likewise, there are as yet no clear figures as to how successful the resident shaped services will be. However, what we can detail is where the original proposals put forward by the services have been adjusted in ways put forward by residents.

For example:

- In LAP 2 the Street Lighting project which was meant to clean and replace the lights; instead there is to be a project to improve lighting underneath bridges in the LAP
- In LAP 7 the mobile speed reduction signs would normally go where there is evidence of accident black-spots. Instead, the siting of the signs is to mix local perceptions with this evidence to attain a different list.
- The languages offered for the Early GCSE in Mother Tongue are different than those originally proposed (i.e. Polish in LAP 1). In addition, after prompting from a number of Steering Groups some alternative venues have been identified as well.

There are many other examples of how services have been shaped at this initial stage but as with the services above until these are delivered we don't know for certain how effective this has been and how improved the services will be as a result.

Likewise, any understanding of how we have been able to increase capacity in the community will not be available in the near future although anecdotal evidence, where it exists, has been largely positive so far.

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