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**REPORT TO: MORAY COUNCIL ON 2 SEPTEMBER 2020**

**SUBJECT: PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING**

**BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)**

**1. REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform the Council of the current progress in developing Participatory Budgeting (PB) within Moray, including work by officers on an initiative with COSLA and the Alan Turing Institute regarding the use of the next generation of the digital platform Consul, as a pilot study.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Council in terms of Section III (B) (1) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to the financial and budgetary policy of the Council.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

**2.1 It is recommended that the Council:**

- (i) notes the delay caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic upon the development of Participatory Budgeting within Moray**
- (ii) considers the initial exploratory work on the enhanced Artificial Intelligence (AI) module of Consul and instruct Officers to continue to progress this work with the intention of running a pilot PB exercise on the platform as outlined in para 5.3**
- (iii) agrees that representatives from Money For Moray (M4M) are to be involved as part of the delivery team for a pilot PB exercise run on the enhanced AI module of Consul**
- (iv) agrees to the use of £50,000, Scottish Government funding to support Care Experienced Children and Young People to be allocated via Participatory Budgeting using a method suitable for this ring-fenced funding stream.**

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 provides a range of powers to strengthen community voices with decision-making that directly

impacts them. It makes particular provisions on participation in public decision making and the role that Participatory Budgeting can play in this.

- 3.2 As a consequence of this, on the 29 October 2017, the Scottish Government and COSLA agreed a framework to work together to have at least 1% of Council budgets subject to PB by the end of the 2020/21 Financial Year.
- 3.3 The 1% has been defined as: "Total estimated expenditure for revenue, as per the local government finance circular, less assumed council tax intake". This is a minimum target and can be made up of revenue and capital expenditure. For Moray in 2020/21 that amount would be equal to £1.7m.
- 3.4 The participatory budgeting framework and policy for Moray was approved at a meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee on 14 January 2020 (paragraph 16 of the minute refers).
- 3.5 Pre-Covid, officers had been working on identifying a number of potential areas for running a PB exercise together with organising a series of briefing meetings for Council Officers, Elected Members and Community Representatives, to be led by Officers from the PB Delivery Team in partnership with the COSLA Participatory Budgeting Training Officer. As a consequence of the pandemic the work on PB was de-prioritised to allow capacity and resources to be directed into emergency response activity.
- 3.6 Pre-Covid the PB Steering Group had identified five potential pilot exercises which covered capital, economic, geographical and service related budgets. The initial areas identified were:
  - (i) **Lands & Parks:** children's' play park equipment covering 3 areas of Moray
  - (ii) **Children's Services:** looked after children funding (see Section 5)
  - (iii) **Economic Development:** Crown Estate Scotland Coastal Improvement Funding
  - (iv) **HRA:** Tenants' Forum
  - (v) **Capital:** Public realm in the vicinity of the replacement Lossiemouth Bridge

With the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic, other than (ii) above, where the funding is time limited, the work on the these pilots has had to be suspended and a new re-evaluation exercise will be required.

- 3.7 At a COSLA PB Officers network meeting held virtually on the 25 May 2020 - attended by an officer from Moray Council PB team - a number of Local Authorities expressed concerns about the impacts of the pandemic on their capacity to deliver against the 1% Framework Agreement in this fiscal year (2020/21). Concerns were also raised about the expected long-term vulnerabilities and impacts of the pandemic on the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities and the exacerbation of existing inequalities in the lives of the most vulnerable communities of place and experience. It is considered that the development of PB across Scotland should reflect emerging concerns arising from the pandemic and that the timescales for achieving 1% budget to allocated by PB should be amended to allow for this.

#### **4. CONSUL DIGITAL PLATFORM**

- 4.1 Consul is an open source digital platform designed to facilitate citizen participation in decision making. It allows any organisation to freely use and modify it. The software was developed by Madrid City Council with funding from the EU and is used in 135 institutions across 35 countries.
- 4.2 COSLA has been actively engaged to develop a pilot that explores the broad range of features of the platform, particularly to facilitate PB. The pilot is a partnership with the Scottish Government, the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government, the Improvement Service and the Democratic Society. COSLA is hosting the platform for member Councils. The first phase of the pilot began with online voting on a PB exercise for West Dunbartonshire Council which ran between 8 and 23 February 2019 with over 4,000 votes being cast.
- 4.3 The Corporate Management Team (CMT) as the PB Steering Group recognised the potential benefit to Moray of adopting Consul as the Council's digital platform for community consultation and instructed the PB team to begin the preliminary set up work which included design of a Moray Participatory Budgeting logo and strap line for use on the site (**APPENDIX 1**).
- 4.4 Officers from the PB team approached COSLA to enquire on the potential use of Consul for generating ideas and analysing feedback in wider community engagements. COSLA responded that prior to lockdown they were working with the Alan Turing Institute and Warwick University who are building and testing artificial intelligence (AI) to be applied to Consul to some of these more complex issues. It had been planned to approach all 32 Local Authorities to enquire if any would be interested in working together with them and the Alan Turing institute on testing the application modules they had developed. Officers of the PB implementation team expressed their interest in being involved.
- 4.5 From officers' expression of interest, an initial meeting was held with representatives from the Alan Turing Institute and COSLA where there was the opportunity to understand the purpose of AI and what would be required from the Council in terms of a pilot. It was explained that the development of AI uses a variety of techniques for grouping and analysing responses from the community and comprised of 4 modules. It was agreed that due to potential GDPR issues, module 4 would not be considered at this time.
- 4.6 It is proposed that officers from the PB team work in conjunction with Senior Officers and the PB Steering Group to identify a suitable project in which to pilot the enhanced AI Consul. The project will be required to allow for input from the community in discussion which will test the various AI modules; from the analysis of the results a resulting full participatory budgeting exercise would be conducted. To assist in community engagement and to ensure that PB within Moray is a partnership between the Council and the citizens, it is envisaged that representatives from Money for Moray (M4M) would be involved as part of the delivery team, for this pilot exercise.

## **5. CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FUNDING**

- 5.1 Prior to the Covid-19 lockdown the Acting Head of Children and Families and Justice Social Work identified a potential funding stream ring-fenced for Care Experienced Children and Young People to support raising attainment that could be suitable for a PB exercise.
- 5.2 At the beginning of June 2020 this possibility was scrutinised by a cross service group of officers including the Corporate Parenting and Commissioning Manager and officers from education, social care and the PB team and it was agreed to recommend this as a pilot.
- 5.3 In line with the Participatory Budgeting Framework document presented to the Policy and Resource Committee on the 14 January 2020 it is now proposed that a delivery team be formed, with membership consisting of officers from Education & Social Care, the PB team, representative from Who Cares? Scotland and young care experienced people themselves. If approved by Council, the delivery team will agree on the format, content and running of the PB exercise. Due to the very defined nature of the funding criteria and potential recipients, it has been agreed that it would not be a suitable project to run on the Consul platform

## **6. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

### **(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))**

The Council's Corporate Plan recognises the value of increasing the involvement and influence of our communities in service design and elements of our budget. The plan commits to empowering and supporting communities to build capacity by becoming involved, influential and active in service design and delivery. Participatory Budgeting will help to take these commitments forward.

### **(b) Policy and Legal**

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 makes particular provisions on participation in public decision making and the role that Participatory Budgeting can play in this

### **(c) Financial implications**

There will be cost implications associated with Participatory Budgeting, in particular from communicating and promoting the exercise within the Community; together with potential costs for setting up IT system to run an online PB voting exercise. These will be identified as part of the Council's financial planning cycle

### **(d) Risk Implications**

There are no risk implications arising directly from this report

### **(e) Staffing Implications**

It is anticipated that there will be resource implications associated with Participatory Budgeting, with a requirement that Officers of the Community Support Unit, ICT and from participating service areas will be

required to set up and / or assist in the running of Participatory Budgeting. It is expected that these will be met from existing resources and no additional staff will be required

**(f) Property**

There are no property implications arising directly from this report.

**(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact**

There are no equalities issues arising directly from this report.

**(h) Consultations**

Members of the Corporate Management Team, the Democratic Services Manager, Chief Financial Officer, Acting Head of Children and Families and Justice Social Work, Committee Services Manager, Head of Education (Resources and Communities), Organisational Development Manager and the Equal Opportunities Officer have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

**7. CONCLUSION**

**7.1 This report provides details on the current situation with regards to Participatory Budgeting within Moray and the delay caused by the Covid-19 pandemic to the process.**

**7.2 The report identifies an opportunity to collaborate with COSLA and The Alan Turing Institute on the Artificial Intelligence (AI) module for the Consul digital platform and to be the first Local Authority to pilot and launch these modules within Scotland.**

**7.3 The report details the proposed first pilot Participatory Budgeting exercise to be conducted within Moray within Education & Social Care by utilising £50,000 funding made available for raising the attainment of looked after children using a method of consultation appropriate for this ring-fenced funding.**

Author of Report: Paul Connor, Principal Accountant

Background Papers:

Ref: