



DUNDEE DECIDES

DUNDEE PILOT PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING PROGRAMME

2017-2018

EVALUATION BY PB PARTNERS



NOTE

PB Partners are a social enterprise commissioned by the Scottish Government to provide support to a national Participatory Budgeting (PB) programme. Dundee Council subsequently independently commissioned PB Partners to provide further support to the Dundee process, to include this evaluation.

BACKGROUND

Participatory Budgeting (PB) originated in Brazil (in the 1980s) and is a method of giving local people the opportunity to decide where public money is spent in their communities. A Brazilian resident involved in PB in its early development said 'If it feels like we've decided, it's PB. If it feels like someone else has decided, it isn't'. This core principle of residents having the final say on allocation of resources is key to PB, regardless of scale: In Porto Alegre £\$200m dollars per annum have been allocated through PB. A town council in England distributed £500 through a PB process. It is also important to recognise that PB should be seen as a community engagement tool, rather than merely a different means of allocating resources. At its height in Porto Alegre, the total funding allocated through PB amounted to 17% of the investment budget ie slightly less than 10% of the overall city budget. The recently announced agreement (Nov 2017) between the Scottish Government and COSLA that there should be an aspiration to allocate 1% of LA funding through PB by 2021, whilst not limiting LA areas to 1%, demonstrates that PB is aimed at complementing, rather than replacing existing methods of allocating resources. The benefits that the PB approach aspires to, (apart from more efficient allocation of resources, based on the principle that residents are the 'experts' in their communities,) are to be found in: increasing trust between residents and service providers, a genuine sense of influence within communities, greater mutual awareness of budget-setting and spending processes, and the fostering of a sense of shared responsibility for the well-being of the places in which people live, work and study.

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THE CONTEXT IN SCOTLAND

Following the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum, and the consequent surge of interest in democratic debate, the Community Empowerment Act (2015), whilst not specifically including PB, made provision in parts 3 and 10 respectively for LA areas to be required to respond to participation requests from citizens, and for people to have the opportunity for participation in public decision making

Whilst (pre 2014-15) there have been some excellent examples of PB in Scotland there was no national strategy for PB. In 2014 the Scottish Government (SG) addressed this through developing a 'Community Choices' programme, which allowed Local Authorities and third sector organisations to bid for SG funding to support local PB programmes. SG also directly commissioned PB Partners and Demsoc (providing digital support) to help facilitate the development of PB programmes nationally. So far, 30 out of 32 Local Authority areas have developed some form of PB, and SG's outlay to date has been £4.9m – to be seen as pump-priming resource, rather than an ongoing 'grants pot': the aim is for Local Authorities and partner organisations to develop sustainable 'in house' PB programmes over time.

The majority of PB programmes across Scotland have focussed on 'small grants' allocation, where a pot of money, (often in this instance matched with SG's Community Choices fund) is made available to local community organisations, and their – generally small scale – proposals are voted on by residents at community voting events. These programmes have proved very successful in engaging and enthusing local residents, and may well have a permanent role to play (as well as, in the first instance, in giving people a 'taste' for PB) particularly at local, neighbourhood/community planning level. A more strategic, 'mainstream' expression of PB however, involves residents commissioning services directly from Councils and partners, for projects and processes that are too large-scale to be delivered at community level.



THE DUNDEE PB PROGRAMME

Dundee has been a relatively 'late adopter' of PB, (The Scottish Government has rolled out its support programme from 2014 onwards). However, whilst most other LA areas have begun with small grants initiatives, Dundee have gone straight to mainstream allocation, and are currently at the forefront of developing mainstream PB processes in Scotland.

Dundee's PB programme has been developed in the context of existing community engagement strategies involving resource allocation, eg through the annual £1m Regeneration Forums initiative, and Youth Council funds. There is a permanent team of 16 full-time Community Regeneration staff based within the Community Learning and Development Service whose core responsibilities are Local Community Planning, Community Engagement and Community Capacity Building. There is also an in-house Engineering team within the City Development Service Area, all of which provided potential infrastructural support to the development of a strategic PB programme.

OUTLINE OF THE PROCESS

(note: Each stage of the process, with timeline, is briefly described below, followed by an 'evaluation box' detailing good practice and points to consider at each stage.)

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Spring 2017: Dundee Council approves £1.2m to be allocated from mainstream council budget Community Infrastructure Fund 2017-18 to be spent on community infrastructure projects - equating to 150k for each of eight city Wards.

GOOD PRACTICE

Ongoing discussion among elected members/officers throughout 2016/17 re possible options, including supportive input from the Leader of the Council, and the Executive Directors of Neighbourhood Services and City Development. Elected members were broadly supportive of the PB idea.

Feb 2017

Paper presented to the Policy and Resources Committee outlining PB proposals which was approved to be included in the 2017/18 budget plan. This 'lead in/development time' is crucial to the success of any mainstream approach to PB. Dundee Council also cognisant of the Scottish Govt/COSLA agreement Nov 2017 to have 1% of all budgets allocated through PB by 2021. £1.2m of funding represents over 30% of that aim (Dundee's entire eligible budget equating to c£300m)

POINTS TO CONSIDER

In future iterations, it might be worth allocating funding per ward based on relative levels of deprivation, rather than a simple 'equal split' between wards. (This decision was, though, taken for what were practical 'process' reasons, given the complexity of setting up the initial programme and the timescales involved)

Spring 2017: The Engage Dundee' consultation to create the new Local Community Plans(2017-2022) was based on the Place Standard Tool and received over 6000 responses in 2016/17. (plus data from other consultation exercises eg Green Flag Assessments and Community Walkabouts.)

GOOD PRACTICE

This approach made good and appropriate use of Dundee's existing community engagement strategies, avoiding having to 'reinvent the wheel' or consultation fatigue within the community.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

In mature PB mainstreaming programmes, there is generally a 'bespoke' consultation phase, which would lead to/incorporate resident input into co-design of projects. This lack of 'PB specific' consultation was highlighted among some resident responses to the process, and can certainly be factored in during any future PB process.



Summer 2017: Council's City Development department produces list of projects for each Ward - based on the consultation responses received.

Project criteria:

- Has to be a 'new' project' ie not already in the Council's plans – although can be a project that 'adds value' to existing proposals
- Affordable within the scope of the fund
- Not have excessive revenue (ongoing) or design costs
- Deliverable in time frame.
- Meet any legal requirements

Indicative projects (average 8-10 per ward area, costing between £30k and £150 k each)

- Sports pavilion upgrade, dropped kerbs, greenspace upgrade, road junction improvements, Park path upgrades, community notice boards, pavement resurfacing

GOOD PRACTICE

In terms of developing a successful PB mainstreaming pilot exercise, this stage in the process was absolutely crucial, and the success in developing an indicative list of deliverable projects is testament to the skill and commitment of the City Development team. The decision was taken early on to have a 'floor limit' of £30k per project, so that each approved intervention would have reasonably substantial impact.

There were specific challenges eg

- Issues re land ownership
- Locating the relevant officer in each department

- in negotiating permissions for projects to be developed and costed across a range of Council departments, and this aspect was managed effectively

The process has created a potential 'culture shift' within the relevant departments: they were being asked to respond directly to residents consultation requests, and also having to work more closely across departments to deliver the desired outcomes.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

There is scope to broaden the 'offer' to the public in future years: The projects developed for the pilot were specifically focussed on infrastructure, as the most 'PB friendly' options in the first instance. The issue of projects for young people being under-represented was also raised, particularly in view of the fact that a lot of the voters garnered were from that cohort.

Autumn 2017: PB programme planning – steering groups in each area – awareness raising, process and publicity design. Elected members briefings, community conference with PB as main agenda item.

GOOD PRACTICE

The programme benefitted from Dundee Council having a strong and committed team of Community Learning and Development (CLD) officers, with a strong track record of developing community engagement programmes. Dundee Council was also able to draw on the support and expertise of Demsoc (digital development) and PB Partners (general PB support) through funding obtained from the Scottish Govts Community Choices (PB) fund. This allowed for the provision of ongoing briefing/training support, working alongside the Community development teams, and providing input at Members' briefings and Community conferences/events.

A delivery programme was thus developed, based around the delivery of the process through e-voting mechanisms. In addition to the Community Development team, regular meetings were held of a PB working group, involving officers from other Council departments, to ensure issues of data protection, legality, promotion and publicity etc were given appropriate attention.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

In future PB processes, it would be worth considering more active involvement of residents/community representation in planning future PB programmes. This desire was clearly expressed in feedback received from resident voters. (One of the core tenets of PB is that the process should, wherever possible, be owned by the participants). Whilst community groups were kept updated and informed – eg through the community conference held in November 2017, there was little active input into programme design. This again was a function of the need to 'keep things simple' in the first instance, especially given the time constraints involved.



Jan-Feb 2018: Online voting **over an 8 week period** – ‘at home’ plus ‘outreach’ options – eg ‘l-pad’ tablets taken to schools, local events etc to collect votes. Complemented by programme of ‘bespoke’ voting events in each ward.

GOOD PRACTICE

11,472 votes were received, equating to over 10% of the City’s eligible **11+** voting population.

The ‘Dundee Decides’ offer was communicated to the community through a number of effective means: website (including short animation film and ‘PB comic’ (very apt for the home of DC Thomson Publishers – Desperate Dan et al) press/radio advertising, outreach/word of mouth etc.

The voting programme was delivered through the use of online technology, which allowed for wide-ranging access to the process:

The voting platform had some minor teething difficulties, which were to be expected, but overall the website was found to be easy to use and navigate, which is an absolutely crucial factor in the success or otherwise of any online voting process. The system used allowed for ‘security’ checks to be in place, which, whilst not absolutely guaranteeing 100% transparency in terms of votes cast, was sufficiently developed to pick up on any ‘suspicious’ voting patterns (eg multiple votes from one address/postcode etc) and was generally considered to be fit for purpose. (See appendix for more information/process/results analysis provided by Demsoc)

The support grant from the Scottish Government allowed for the purchase of 70 l-pad style tablets, which allowed for:

- The community development team to provide ready access to the voting website, especially with regard to residents with no IT access
- Flexible use of the tablets in different settings –eg at existing community events; there were also examples of where tablets were left with workers at community centres to collect votes in the absence of the CLD team.

The use of tablets was complemented by encouraging voters to log on to the website and vote at home/from their own devices. (A ‘vote on your phone’ initiative in local schools was particularly well received by pupils as use of mobile phones in schools is usually prohibited!). A particularly successful example of the outreach work undertaken by the CLD team involved sessions at local high schools, where pupils took up the ‘voting offer’ enthusiastically, and in turn took the message home to their families. There were also numerous examples of successful ‘piggybacking’ on existing community events: these instances really demonstrated the value of having ‘voting tablets’ available for easy, immediate use.

There were also bespoke voting events held in each ward area, where residents were encouraged – often with the offer of food/refreshments – to drop in, find out more about the projects, discuss options and then vote.

The commitment, creativity and sheer amount of effort put in to the process by the CLD team was evident throughout this stage of the process.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

The tight time scale in the lead-in to the voting period meant the delivery team may not have had the resources/opportunity to maximise the benefits of the outreach programme.

Whilst the CLD team did a fantastic job of vote-gathering, it was noted that other departments within the Council, and also partner agencies, could perhaps also have been involved in this part of the process. This is certainly a consideration going forward.

Need to balance the following comment with recognition of the extensive time and effort undertaken across the city to deliver approximately 400 outreach sessions in a diverse range of settings.

The 'drop-in' bespoke voting events weren't particularly well attended, (in spite of being well-advertised through leaflet drops etc) and, whilst there was a clear and serious aspiration on behalf of management and the delivery team to encourage these events to become genuine deliberative spaces, where residents would be able to discuss the merits of the projects with each other, and draw on 'expert' input from officers in attendance, in practice this never really took off. There was perhaps a sense that residents, having turned up to vote, shouldn't be pressured into staying longer than they wanted to: This deliberative element, a key component of mature PB processes, often develops 'organically', over time, as residents become more aware of their potential influence on spending decisions, and thus require increasing levels of information in order to make more informed decisions.



March 2018: One event for the whole city to announce winning projects, promote PB going forward.

Results: A range of projects were selected across the ward areas, road safety, park improvements, outdoor play facilities etc. (See Appendix for full list.)

GOOD PRACTICE

The event was held in a Central location, which helped emphasise the 'City-wide' nature of the exercise, and was well attended by a good cross-section of interested parties; elected members, heads of department, community representatives etc.

The emphasis was on creating interest in announcing the successful projects and fostering a sense of shared celebration, rather than focussing too much on the technical aspects of process evaluation etc. (Although there was sufficient 'technical' input from Demsoc and PB Partners to provide evidence of the robustness and integrity of the process.). There was a clear sense throughout of shared achievement and potential to build on the success of the programme going forward.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

The community representation was less than hoped for; it may be that holding the event 'in working hours' militated against more attendance from community members.

Not sure if you got this feedback directly from Community Reps. Over the years we have spent time discussing venues, timings etc. and this one was agreed with different Community Representative networks. Evenings can be a hit or a miss however there was a good cross-section of attendees at the event. We also had to take the availability of the Leader of Administration and Chief Executive into account.

March 2018 - March 2019: Evaluation of process/monitoring of project spend/delivery and development of next tranche of PB going forward.



GOOD PRACTICE

Voter response:

'This is the way to go.'

'This is our chance to get back to the council about what we want'

'Great idea. Letting the community be involved in these decisions is brilliant.'

Quotes from local residents:

Of the 11,500 votes received, 4400 voters completed the online evaluation forms – (see appendix for details of feedback). The overall responses were overwhelmingly positive, but in itself, a completion rate of over 35% - where the average response rate to these exercises hovers around 10% - indicates residents' positive engagement with the process, and willingness to support it.

Sample responses:

Q: Has Dundee Decides Helped you have a greater say in how money is spent in your community?

A: Yes 75% No 8% Don't Know 17%

Q: Is this a good way to allocate funds?

A: Yes 81% No 6% Don't Know 13%

Q: Has Dundee Decides Helped you have a greater say in how money is spent in your community?

A: Yes 75% No 8% Don't Know 17%

Q: Did taking part help you understand the different costs of projects?

A: Yes 79% No 12% Don't Know 10%

Q: Have you taken part in community engagement exercises before?

A: Yes 18% No 77% Don't Know 5%

Q: Would you take part in the future?

A: Yes 87% No 4% Don't Know 9%

The approval ratings of the process are uniformly high, over 80% thinking this is a fair way to allocate funds, and likewise regarding repeating the process, which clearly indicates an appetite within the community for this work to be continued. These approval ratings are in line with findings relating to other PB programmes in Scotland and further afield: what is particularly striking is the response to the question regarding previous community engagement exercises: over three quarters (77%) of respondents hadn't been involved in any community engagement exercise before.

PB should always be seen as a community engagement tool, as well as a means of resource allocation, and this finding definitely bears that out. It's particularly significant given the large scale of engagement and the percentage of evaluation responses received.

(see appendix for more detail on resident feedback.)

Officers' feedback:

The responses from the CLD team and the City Development Department have been in general positive.

Some comments from officers from throughout the process:

'I can't think of any negatives at all really.'

'We're having to make new relationships with community organisations to do the outreach effectively'

'This is a really interesting project; it's real. There's a perception that community plans are often just written 'in house'. But PB makes us directly accountable to the community.'

'PB complements our role; it enables both new and deeper community engagement.'

'Interesting, enjoyable. Good to be working on something different.'

'A huge piece of work, but very interesting and positive, so I don't mind'

Officers commented that PB can be seen as a process, rather than an outcome, ie the engagement process is at least as important as the spending outcomes. PB can piggyback on existing engagement strategies, so it isn't a 'zero sum', where PB is grafted onto the existing workload.

It was felt that this first tranche of PB would benefit from being targeted on infrastructure/visual improvements – people will be able to literally see the improvements for themselves – reinforcing the link in residents' minds between their involvement in the process and visible improvements to their communities.

It was also observed that more deliberative engagement with PB in future would inform residents regarding contentious community issues, eg school parking, to provide more insight into council decision-making processes.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

Re the comment below, suggest we highlight that PB is naturally intrinsic to Local Community Planning, our core business. The challenge the next time is to ensure that any implications for overall workload allocation are dealt with proactively rather than reactively. This is linked to the need to foster more ownership of PB from DCC Service Areas, the 3rd Sector and local communities in terms of collective planning and delivery of the process.

Whilst the CLD team have been in general very supportive of the process, there was also a sense of relief at 'being able to get back to the day job': there is a potential danger of burnout unless plans are in place to provide year-on-year sustainable resources to the process, either directly through dedicated resources made available to the PB programme by the Council, and/or meaningful buy-in to support the process from other council departments and partner agencies. Having said this, any PB programme becomes easier to deliver over time, as a lot of the hard work of planning/design is done in year one.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The community to be more actively involved in co-design of projects in future – this a key piece of feedback from participants
2. Timescales to be more manageable – in terms of lead-in times and also so that the bulk of the outreach work doesn't fall in Feb/March when there are competing demands on officer time eg turning around Regeneration Forum bids etc. Also the winter months not ideal in terms of creating optimum response.
3. Consideration to be given to development of parallel PB mainstream and 'small grants' processes going forward – possibly utilising a percentage of Regeneration Forum funds to be allocated through a small grants PB programme? (The existing Regen Forum members might then take on the role of PB steering group members?) This would create a wider base of PB engagement within the community: a two way process where small grants events attract 'new blood' to engagement processes and the Council-delivered projects can stimulate responses within the community in terms of developing smaller scale, community-led interventions.
4. To link PB processes going forward more structurally with community planning/ CPP processes, so that an 'annual cycle' of consultation, planning/co-production, decision-making and monitoring/evaluation can be developed. It is important that PB outcomes are in broad alignment with Community planning aims.
5. To develop stronger links with other Council Depts and Partners (eg Health, Housing, Police Scotland etc) so that additional resource – both in terms of project funds and infrastructural support can be drawn upon to increase potential sustainability of PB processes in future. It would be worth considering setting up PB-specific meetings with representatives from various depts. (and outside partners at some point?) in good time to deliver a more smoothly run process in future.
6. To consider the development of mainstream PB beyond offering residents a 'menu of options' to choose from, to more fully-fledged resident decision-making around budget-setting in the round. The examples of PB in Latin America, and closer to home, with, for example, the Shetland Isles' Building Budgets' programme, demonstrates that tools and mechanisms exist to allow progressively greater access to budgetary decision-making on the part of residents.



CONCLUSION

Since 2014, participatory budgeting has experienced exponential growth in Scotland, for the reasons of policy, resource commitment and desire for greater levels of democratic deliberation referred to in the introduction. The aim throughout has been to move PB towards a sustainable means of community engagement, through the development of mainstream PB programmes. The starting point for most Local Authorities and partner organisations has been the development of - largely very successful - small grants PB programmes, for reasons of ease/feasibility of development and delivery. In the last two years, and particularly following the announcement of the SG/COSLA agreement in November 2017 for 1% of LA budgets to be allocated via PB processes by 2021, there has been growing theoretical interest in developing mainstream PB programmes.

Dundee Council deserves enormous credit for going beyond theoretical interest to developing and delivering a workable mainstream PB exercise. A key point in the process was the design and production of the list of indicative projects produced by the City Development Department. A mechanism was thus created that allowed for residents to have direct access to decisions relating to mainstream Council expenditure.

It's important to recognise that the £1.2m would have been spent in any case, very possibly on a similar set of interventions, so no extra cost to the Council was incurred in that respect. The added value of the process, over more traditional methods of resource allocation, is evident in the positive response of the voting community: it is also notable that, the time pressures and extra workload notwithstanding, the CLD and City Development officers responsible for the hands-on delivery, have embraced the theory and practice of PB so enthusiastically. If, at any level, from the Council Leader to the resident voters, mere lip service had been paid to the programme, the results would not have been anything like as impressive.

Overall, Dundee Decides has been an outstanding success, in terms of pioneering the development and delivery of a pilot mainstream PB programme in Scotland, and something that will hopefully serve as an inspiration to other Local Authority areas as they develop their PB programmes in future.





FEEDBACK

"I thought the site was designed well and very interactive."

"Allow the public to put forward ideas!"

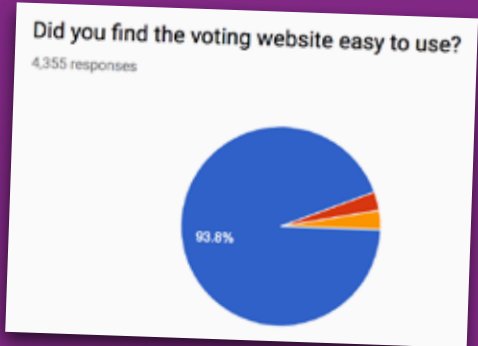
"Easy to use, straight forward, easy to navigate."

"More information of budget breakdown on projects."

"Potentially very empowering for Dundee's communities."

"Great idea! More please!"

"I thought the site was designed well and very interactive."



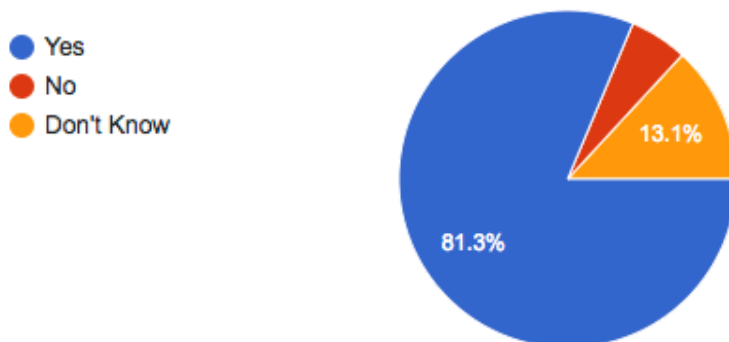
APPENDIX

(note: Each stage of the process, with timeline, is briefly described below, followed by an 'evaluation box' detailing good practice and points to consider at each stage.)

Spring 2017: Dundee Council approves £1.2m to be allocated from mainstream council budget Community Infrastructure Fund 2017-18 to be spent on community infrastructure projects - equating to 150k for each of eight city Wards.

Do you think that Dundee Decides is a good way to allocate public funds?

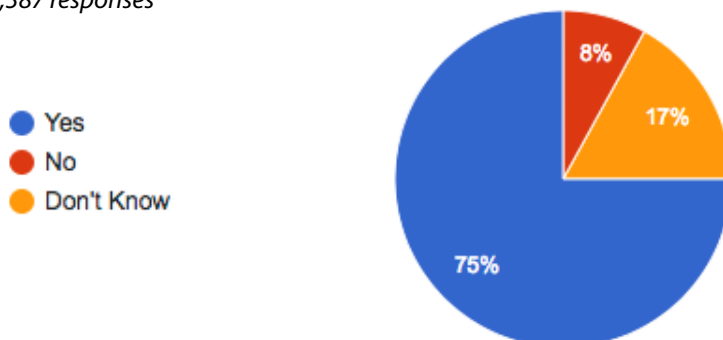
4,365 responses



16

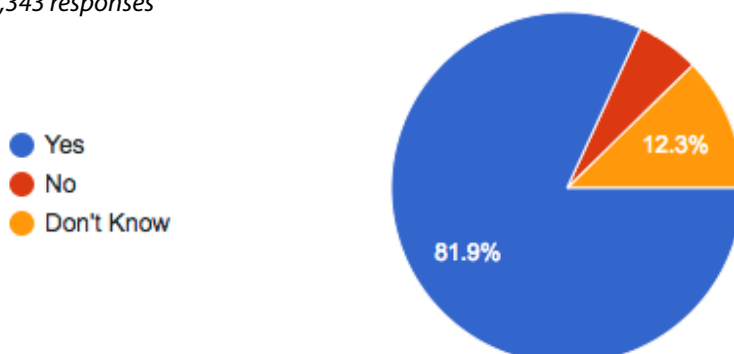
Do you feel that Dundee Decides has helped you have a greater say on how money is spent in your community?

4,387 responses



Would you like more council budgets to be allocated in this way in the future?

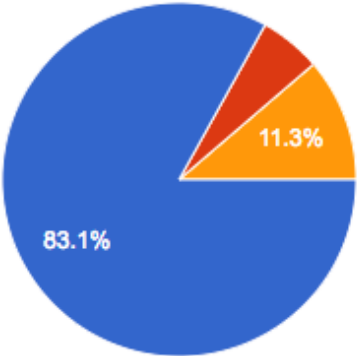
4,343 responses



Do you think Dundee Decides is an effective way of increasing community involvement in decision making?

4,368 responses

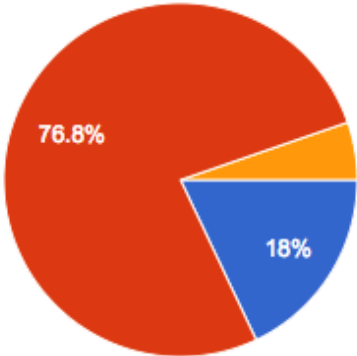
- Yes
- No
- Don't Know



Have you taken part in decisions about your local community before?

4,400 responses

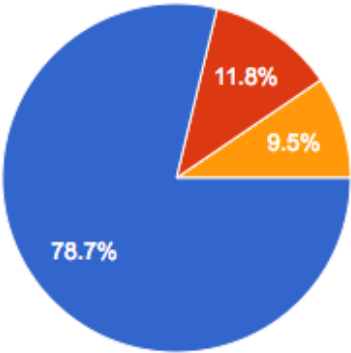
- Yes
- No
- Don't Know



Did taking part in Dundee Decides help you understand the different costs of infrastructure projects?

4,348 responses

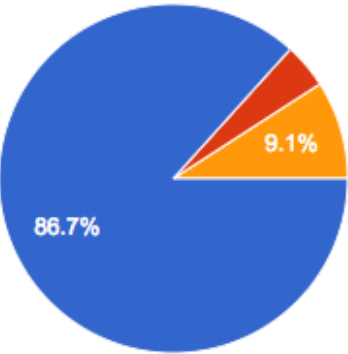
- Yes
- No
- Don't Know



Would you take part in a process like Dundee Decides in the future?

4,302 responses

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know



Voting options
selected/removed
112,508
times

To
turn
11,4

1588

1498

1447

STRATHMARTINE

LOCHEE

COLDSIDE

MA

WEST END

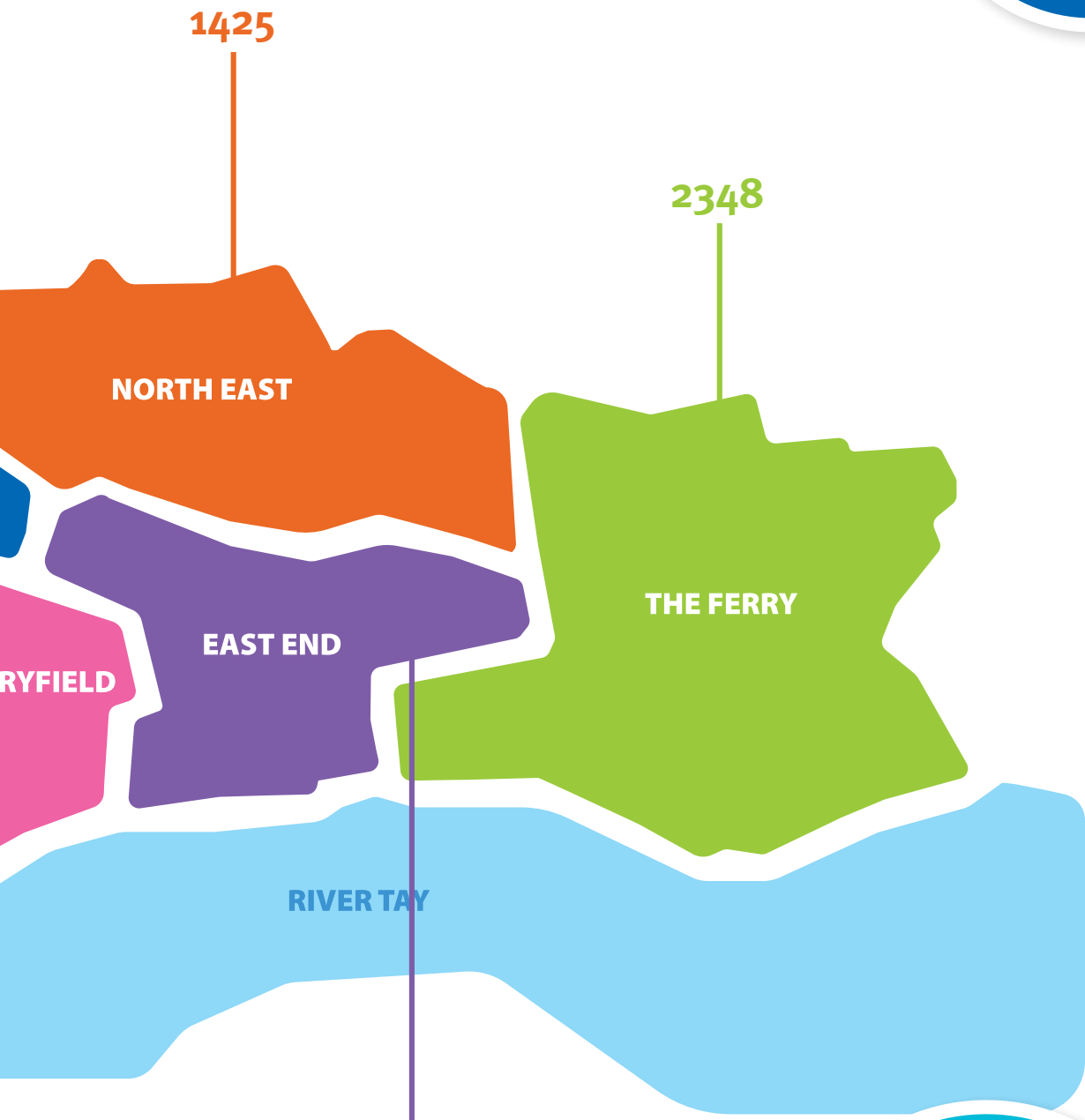
1292

851

Projects
explored
11,545
times

total
about
472!

Map explored
2041
times



Project
Design PDFs
opened
1,729
times

DUNDEE DECIDES

