

The background of the slide features a large, light blue watermark of the City of Vancouver's coat of arms. The crest includes a crown with four maple leaves, a shield divided into four quadrants (top-left: a saltire, top-right: a stag's head, bottom-left: a sailing ship, bottom-right: an eagle), and a banner at the bottom with the motto 'A NE FOR A'.

## **Agenda Item 9**

# **Closer to Communities & Community Choices Report**

**Falkirk Council**

**Title: Closer to Communities & Community Choices Report**

**Meeting: Executive**

**Date: 30 November 2021**

**Submitted By: Director of Corporate & Housing Services**

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 Closer to Communities and Community Choices is a Council of the Future priority project. It reports to the Communities Workstream Board and supports the Council's Corporate Plan Community Priority and delivers on the Enabled Communities Report Approved by the Executive in October 2020. This report provides an update on the progress of the Closer to Communities and Community Choices Change Project.

**2. Recommendations**

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

- 1) Note the progress of the Closer to Communities and Community Choices Project.
- 2) Note that the savings from this project that have been agreed in the business plan.

**3. Background**

- 3.1 Members will be aware of the work of the Closer to Communities and the Community Choices project through previous Committee reports, including the Enabled Communities Report in October 2020 and most recently to Executive Committee on 05 October 2021. In addition, members have received regular briefing sessions and updates on Community Choices over since February 2021.
- 3.2 Through this project, Falkirk Council will transform the way that it delivers Community Development Services to have a greater focus on enabling and strengthening community organisations to do more for themselves. We are assessing community capacity and offering capacity building support by working jointly with CVS Falkirk to establish strong social infrastructure in the form of hubs or community anchor organisations.
- 3.3 Social Infrastructure has social, economic and civic benefits.<sup>1</sup> The pandemic provided further evidence to support the What Works Scotland report<sup>2</sup> which

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<sup>1</sup> [Social infrastructure and levelling up – building resilient communities – LGIU](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Community Anchors | What Works Scotland](#)

found that where anchor organisations exist, communities have increased levels of participation, leadership and can broker complex and inclusive networks of partnership through the delivery of local activities. Social infrastructure is good for people and communities and are good partners to public services to address wellbeing and social issues.

- 3.4 The Community Empowerment Act (Scotland) 2015 was put in place to help communities do more for themselves and be more involved in decisions that affect them.<sup>3</sup> In empowered communities, people feel they have permission to take control over their own lives, they help one another and they participate more in activities that reduce the impact of inequalities.
- 3.5 Asset Transfer and Community Choices are two key empowerment and transformation tools being developed and tested within this project.
- 3.6 The delivery of this project meets our requirement to allocate 1% of Falkirk Council's budget to participatory budgeting measures for the financial year 21/22. The 1% is an on-going requirement for the Council, and this project is establishing a co-designed Community Choices framework for future years.

#### **4. Project Aims**

- 4.1 By the end of this project, March 2024, communities will have the confidence, skills and resources to do more for themselves including managing community resources, applying for funding, co-producing services and determining budget spend in line with the priorities anchor organisations have identified within their communities. This will be demonstrated through communities managing their own community assets through the asset transfer process and communities deciding on how at least 1% of Council budget is spent. through Community Choices.
- 4.2 Throughout the project's three-year timeline, we will establish fifteen anchor organisations with the knowledge, skills and confidence to take leadership in their own community development and organisational management. This will reduce the need for direct Council development support and increase community capacity to collaborate with Falkirk Council to meet shared aims.
- 4.3 Council support will take a more enabling approach and we will increase the use of third sector services that also offer support. These will be the key elements of the transformation of our Community Services.
- 4.4 We will co-design, test and implement Asset Transfer and Community Choices as tools to support more enabled communities.

#### **5. Achievements to date**

##### **Community Empowerment**

- 5.1 22 organisations have assessed their capacity to become Anchor organisations via an Organisational Health Check self-assessment. The initial assessment

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<sup>3</sup> [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act: summary - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/community-empowerment-act-2015/pages/introduction/)

noted 'cold areas' where additional time was spent pro-actively reaching out to organisations.

- 5.2 A capacity building and anchor organisation plan is being developed which will meet the training and development needs of the groups identified as part of the self-assessment process, including governance, funding, Disclosure checks and data protection, safeguarding, health and safety organisational policies, volunteering and support to recruit volunteers.

### **Community Choices**

- 5.3 Community Choices Pilot Phase 1 is complete, and a full evaluation report is attached as Appendix 1 of this report.
- 5.4 Pilot Phase 1 of the scheme launched in February 2021 and received a high level of interest. A total of 113 groups expressed an interest in the scheme and 48 groups received small grants whilst 65 groups were awarded capital funding. The first pilot phase saw 9053 members of the public voted to award circa £630,000 of revenue and capital funds.
- 5.5 Members received regular briefings and updates before, during and after the first pilot phase and were directly involved in the evaluation and changes made for pilot phase 2.

### **Community Asset Transfer**

- 5.6 Following the lifting of the covid restrictions, we are actively working with 12 Management Committees to progress lease signing.
- 5.7 The closure of Halls during the pandemic impacted on the capacity of Management Committees with a few choosing to close.
- 5.8 Committees that wish to proceed with a lease are offered support to develop a business plan, undergo an organisational health check and create a capacity building plan for the committee. This support will be delivered in partnership between Community Learning and Development staff and CVS Falkirk.

## **6. Future Benefits of the projects**

- 6.1 Whilst the projects have already made significant progress there are future benefits which include a potential saving of £480,000 over 3 years through reduced staff costs and a reduction in hall maintenance costs from the Community Learning and Development Budget.
- 6.2 These savings are included in our Business Plan and will take place across the three years of the project.

<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2023/24</b>
£115,000	£268,000	£97,000

- 6.3 £3.14m investment of capital and revenue funds in local communities through Community Choices was agreed by members in October 2020. Provision has been made in our General Services Capital Programme and Revenue Budget to secure this budget which is 1% of Council budget for 2020/21.
- 6.4 The project is co-developing a robust system of public voting on decision making which can be adopted across the organisation as required and will be recognised as a model of best practice nationally.

## 7. Performance Monitoring & Reporting

- 7.1 The project has identified key performance targets which are set out in Table 1.

Table 1 – Key Performance Targets to be reached by March 2024:

Targets for Community Led Community Development:
1. 15 of Anchor Organisations established 2. Amount of training provided – <i>establish baselines for hours, attendance and application of learning</i> 3. 15 Organisations receiving management support.
Targets for Asset Transfers
4. 11 asset transfer plans supported 5. 11 asset transfers complete.
Targets for Community Choices
6. Number of expressions of Interest – <i>establish baseline</i> 7. Number of full Community Choices applications received – <i>establish baseline</i> 8. 5% of Falkirk's residents vote in Community Choices 9. The full 1% of Community Choices funding is allocated 10. Range of Community Choices bid categories - <i>report on range of social outcomes achieved through project delivery. Will be determined by the bids in each round.</i>
Targets for Empowerment
11. To be developed with Communities Shaping Falkirk's Future Project.

## 8. Considerations

- 8.1 The Community Choices and Closer to Communities project provides the opportunity to radically change the relationship between communities and Falkirk Council from a dependency culture to one of independence where strong community organisations have the knowledge, skills, confidence and resources to take forward activities and initiatives that meet their community needs best.
- 8.2 Over the next 6 months we will focus on progressing the delivery of Pilot Phase 2 of Community Choices, work towards the delivery of key performance targets, develop capacity building and anchor organisation plans across the Council area. As part of this we will develop training in participatory research and the 'Reach -In Model' aiming to reach all voices and views.

- 8.3 We are also working closely with CVS Falkirk to develop a Community Leadership Network/Forum and to support the transfer of 5 Community Assets.

## **9. Implications**

### **Financial**

- 9.1 There are no new financial implications in this update. Section 5.1 sets out the potential financial benefits achievable by the project.

### **Resources**

- 9.2 Closer to Communities and Community Choices is deliverable based on the current 1% Council budget aligned to these projects. Work on mainstreaming this into Council budgets is underway.

### **Legal**

- 9.3 This project delivers on Falkirk Council's responsibilities under the Community Empowerment Act (2015) Scotland. The Community Choices sections of the project delivers on Falkirk Council's agreement with COSLA to commit 1% of its budget to Participatory Budgeting Processes.

### **Risks**

- 9.4 A risk log has been developed which identifies and mitigates risks this will be continually monitored and managed by the project team and Sponsor.

### **Equalities**

- 9.5 EPIA will be undertaken for the project.

### **Sustainability/Environmental Impact**

- 9.6 Going forward, Community Choices will be delivered in conjunction with the Councils' Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES). From Phase 2 onwards, all expressions of interest will be required to demonstrate how they consider climate change or contribute towards carbon reduction. The Council's Climate Change Officer will assess all expressions of interest.

## **10. Conclusions**

- 10.1 The project has been considered by the Council of the future Board and at a briefing for all elected members. The Community Choices element of the project has also been considered in various briefings and papers for elected all members.
- 10.2 The first round of Community Choices generated a lot of interest within our communities, and we will take forward learning points from this round into our second round.

- 10.3 The community empowerment work is uncovering varying levels of capacity and confidence within community organisations and a good level of interest in the concept of anchor organisations.
- 10.4 We will continue to develop, implement, and mainstream participatory budgeting processes as an investment in communities and their capacity.

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Director of Corporate & Housing Services

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Paul Anderson, Community Planning Coordinator

Date: 15 November 2021

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Community Choices Pilot Phase 1 Evaluation Report February 2021  
- July 2021

## **List of Background Papers**

None



# CommunityCHOICES

Phase 1 Evaluation Report -  
February 2021- July 2021

Pilot year 20/21



Falkirk Council



CommunityCHOICES





## What is Community Choices

Community Choices is the term used in Scotland for participatory budgeting. Through a public vote, participatory budgeting offers a democratic way for local residents to have a direct say in how a defined public budget can be used to address their priorities.

Falkirk Council is working alongside our partners in the Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership to launch the Community Choices initiative – a fund of over £3M invested in local community projects, created by local groups and voted for by local residents. The fund is divided across Falkirk's 9 electoral wards based on child poverty rates of each ward.

We believe that communities know what's best for themselves – and what they need to improve the quality of life for residents where you live. Community Choices wants to capture that local ambition and aspiration and invest in community participation that encourages local people to become involved in delivering activities and social infrastructure that are important to them.

## Collaborating in Design

The first of its kind in Falkirk, Community Choices 2020/21 was designed to run 2 pilot phases in order to ensure we are developing and co-designing the rules and the terms and conditions with local people and stakeholders throughout the pilot phases.

From the beginning, the programme recruited the Advisory Panel. The Advisory Panel is a key aspect of Community Choices. The Panel has seventeen members in total, with a community representative for each of the nine wards; four Council officers, including one from the Falkirk HSCP; and four third sector representatives.

This report represents the full evaluation of the first phase of the pilot year and what we learned together.

The evaluation process including interviews with community groups, a focus group with Advisory Panel members and surveys to applicants and elected members. The recommendations of the evaluation were tested with these stakeholders.

Throughout the first pilot we also adapted and recorded learning from the Advisory Panel as we went and again after the evaluation findings were gathered.

We will repeat the evaluation at the end of the pilot phase 2. We welcome your feedback and input throughout at [community.choices@falkirk.gov.uk](mailto:community.choices@falkirk.gov.uk)

## Aims of Community Choices

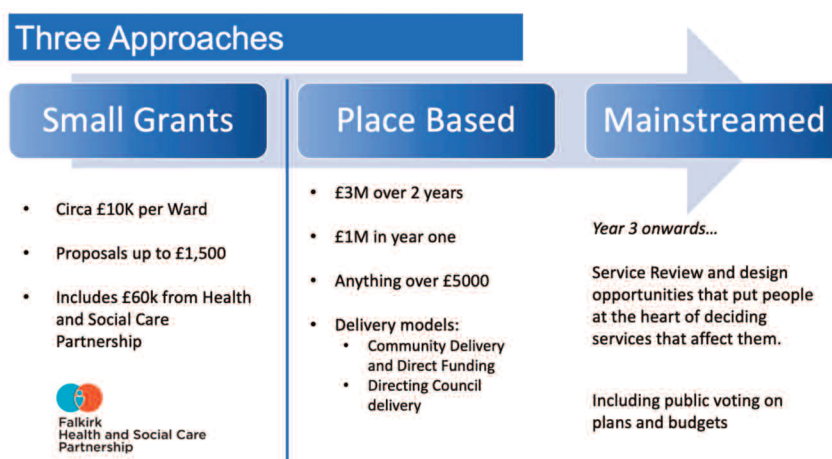
During the pilot year 2020/21, we hope to achieve:

- *A more positive relationship between communities and Falkirk Council*
- *Support positivity and encourage post lockdown thinking in communities*
- *Provide a reason for community groups to find ways to reconnect safely during the lockdown and as it eased.*
- *Deliver on a commitment to invest in communities to do more for themselves.*

Longer term we hope that Community Choices will:

- *Increase the public's knowledge how public finances are allocated and spent.*
- *Providing a way that communities and residents can become more engaged in local decision-making*
- *Help communities to identify and meet their own needs*

## Falkirk's Pilot Community Choices Programme 2020/21



### What Happened

In February 2021, the first pilot phase of Community Choices opened up for expressions of interest and project ideas for both the Small Grants and the Place-Based Capital programmes.

### Communications

The opportunity for community groups and individuals to participate in pilot phase 1 was communicated in several ways.

Due to the pandemic, we mainly disseminated information electronically and asked a wide range of community partners and networks to help. CVS Falkirk's e-newsletter promoted the information to third sector organisations for several weeks. Council community staff also circulated information in local places and networks and we emailed information and met with Community Councils and equalities groups.

Communities may also have heard about Community Choices through the Health and Social Care Partnership, targeted Facebook campaigns, a local elected Member or through articles that ran in the Falkirk Herald.

In addition, we printed and provided some hardcopy posters to ensure that individuals who are not digitally connected would hear about the programme.

### Advisory Panel

In partnership with the Health and Social Care Partnership and CVS Falkirk, an Advisory Panel was set up comprising of partner Officers, 9 community members and 4 third sector organisations. The Panel assisted with supporting and reviewing the process from a range of perspectives. The Panel also reviewed expressions of interest and applications, offering support and agreeing with Officers which projects met the eligibility requirements of the programme.

Community Representatives and third sector representatives were chosen through an application process. Applications were received to join the panel and assessed against criteria by a panel of Officers from Falkirk Council, the Health and Social Care Partnership and CVS Falkirk.

Council Officers with professional knowledge relating to the needs of project proposals were asked to join the panel to offer support to applicants and panel members.

## Expressions of Interest

Ward	Small Grants EOIs	Place Based Capital EOIs	Total (SG+C)
Ward 1- Bo'ness and Blackness	6	11	16
Ward 2 – Grangemouth	4	9	13
Ward 3 - Denny and Banknock	6	7	12
Ward 4 - Carse, Kinnaird and Tryst	6	4	10
Ward 5 - Bonnybridge and Larbert	3	4	7
Ward 6 - Falkirk North	8	9	15
Ward 7 - Falkirk South	10	10	22
Ward 8 - Lower Braes	4	7	10
Ward 9 - Upper Braes	1	4	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>113</b>

113 Expressions of Interest (EOIs) were received, 65 of which were capital projects.

Further to feedback from applicants, Officers and the Advisory Panel and due to the larger than expected response, timescales for full applications and public voting were extended by 4 weeks for Small Grants and 9 weeks for Place Based Capital grants.

Full applications were completed by May for the Small Grants and June for the Place Based projects.

Voting for the Small Grants was open between 24 May and 18 June 2021.

1679 eligible votes were cast resulting in £51,000 of funds being awarded across the 9 Wards.

Voting for the Capital programme was open between 21 June and 16 July.

13,366 eligible votes were cast resulting in £578,130 of funds being awarded across the 9 wards.

Any unallocated funding in each Ward will be added to that Ward's allocation for pilot phase 2.

## How Voting Worked

The rules for voting in pilot phase 1 were based on research and experience of other local authorities who have already delivered their own participatory budgeting programme. We were able to benefit from their learning. Due to the pandemic, voters were only able to vote online or by paper ballot; in-person public voting events were not held.

Each resident has 3 votes and are asked to select their three favourite ideas that they would like to see funded. Where there are smaller concentrations of households in an area, votes were weighted to ensure a small settlement's project ideas had a fair chance as areas with more residents.

In order to secure funding, each project must attain at least 10% of the total eligible votes cast in that ward. The projects with the most votes will be awarded the funding requested until that ward's budget is drawn down.



## How We Evaluated Community Choices

An evaluation of pilot phase 1 was carried out by:

- *Reviewing all feedback, comments and emails received during the process.*
- *Face to face interviews with community groups, that applied for Community Choices and those that did not.*
- *Briefing sessions and discussion with elected Members on the results of the evaluation at the midpoint.*
- *A focus group with Advisory Panel members at the midpoint, in addition to their on-going input and feedback that shaped the programme as it unfolded in pilot phase 1.*
- *Surveys to applicants and elected members to test the findings and recommendations of the evaluation process. The results of this are included in Appendix 1.*

## What We Learned

### What went well:

- *Approximately 5% of Falkirk's residents voted in pilot phase 1. This is higher than the national average of 3% seen in other local authority areas who have been running participatory budgeting programmes for longer.*
- *Citizen Space is easy to use and does not require voters to register for an account.*
- *The paper ballot has proved popular, with groups requesting an email copy and printing them off as required.*
- *Weighted voting has been introduced to ensure that smaller communities do not feel disenfranchised, and this was used appropriately.*
- *There were significantly more applications than expected demonstrating a great level of interest in the programme and the investment in local activities and social space.*
- *Anecdotally, people told us the discussions, the preparation and the publishing of project ideas raised awareness of community activities and groups in some areas.*
- *£669,130 of public funds were invested in community identified and community led priorities and activities.*
- *The 10% minimum votes in a Ward rule ensures that in Wards where only one or two project ideas were put forward, there was public support for the projects and they did not win by default.*





## What Feedback Suggested Should be Improved:

- The ward-based voting system disadvantaged groups that offered services and activities that benefited more than one ward.
- The total number of votes rejected was much too high due to votes being cast on a ward basis only.
- The voting rules could be clearer and would have helped to reduce rejected votes:

**'Also clearer information about who could vote for which projects as many other projects were advocating for votes from those who lived out with the ward.' – Applicant Feedback**

- The rules should prohibit projects from putting forward proposals for the entire amount available in a ward. The funds would benefit more projects, but could reduce the viability of one-off community led projects such as transferring a building or some land.
- The total number of expressions of interest and votes cast for the Small Grants option were lower than the larger Place Based Capital Grants. We need to understand why and test ways to improve this. Feedback indicated it was a lengthy process for a small grant.
- More communication and awareness raising would have been helpful to ensure more people know about Community Choices.
- It would have been helpful to know who other applicants were in the area prior to the vote so they could all get together and discuss how to promote voting and any possible ways to work together.
- Community ownership of Place-Based Capital projects needs to be clearer in the application process for grants.
- Greater clarity around the Advisory Panel's role and remit is needed going forward.
- It was suggested that awards should be proportional to the total percentage of the vote received in a Ward. This is known as a proportional voting system.

**'Only thing that wasn't clear was how the voting results correlated to awards. Do you have to get a minimum number of votes, a minimum percentage of the votes etc.' – Applicant Feedback**

- The manual processing of counting and verifying results is inefficient, resource-intensive, and needs to be improved and faster.
- Applicants should at least consider if the proposal is carbon neutral or not.
- Community Choices impacts on how the Council normally plans and delivers work. Several projects wished to influence what the Council delivered rather than take ownership of a capital project. This is a different form of participatory budgeting from grants called 'mainstreaming'. A Council Officer Working Group should be established to consider ways to implement this option.
- Many winning projects requested support from the Council that could not be provided to take their projects forward. Independent ownership and delivery of projects should be clearer in all communications and any support requested from the Council should be considered and requested at the application stage for the benefit of clarity of if it can or cannot be offered. Wherever possible, Falkirk Council endeavours to support successful projects but cannot take on a project's delivery.

### **What will not change for Phase 2 of the Pilot:**

1. We will continue to use the voting system in place and not adopt a proportional voting system or a ranked voting system because:
  - a. doing so would result in part awards for projects who would then only be deliverable with match funding.
  - b. manually counting and checking a ranked vote would be too resource intensive and add significant time to the notification of awards.
2. Community Ownership of projects will continue to be required in the grants programmes.
  - a. Falkirk Council will begin to develop and test mainstreamed approaches to Community Choices in alternative ways.
3. We will manually count the votes again in pilot phase 2 despite this taking longer.
  - a. We will not have software in place for pilot phase 2 that can automate the verification of votes. However, we will continue to investigate and consider costs for implementing software.
  - b. It is likely to require a change to the voting platform that could be disruptive. For example, it may require voter registration on a new website.
- d. A project description box will be included in the Application Form to speed up the time between a closing date and the vote opening.
- e. Applications information will be published online and applicants will be offered the opportunity to consent to a contact email being published in order that other local applicants or project supporters could get in touch if they wished to.
- f. Clearer information and support on the requirement for community ownership will be embedded across all grant based Community Choices documentation.
4. More detailed information will be available to voters
  - a. A set of terms and conditions available online
  - b. Information on how voting works at the point of voting
5. The Small Grant process will be streamlined:
  - a. We will remove the expression of interest stage.
  - b. We will also shorten the closing date for the Small Grants.
  - c. The Small Grants funding limit will be increased to £5,000 to see if it generates a wider range of bids.

### **What will change for Phase 2 of the Pilot:**

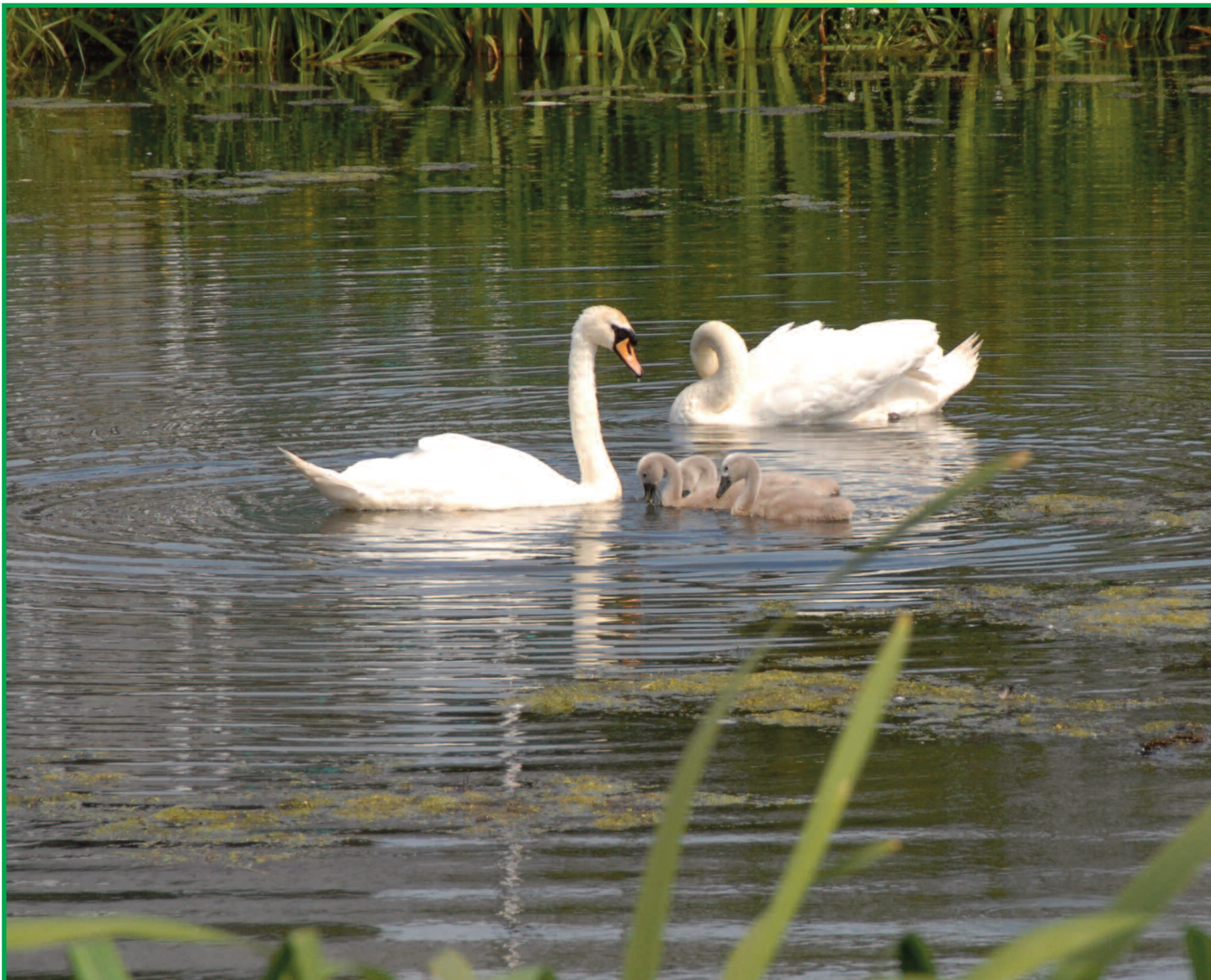
1. There will be a Falkirk wide project category in pilot phase 2.
2. Community groups will be limited to apply for a maximum of 60% of total Ward allocation for any single project.
3. The Terms and Conditions and Application documents will be clarified in the following areas:
  - a. Eligibility of a Community Body
  - b. Organisational viability information will be sought at the application stage
  - c. Full applications Capital Place Based projects will require to have completed a viability checklist for costs, planning permission, ownership and liability considerations.
6. We will remove the expression of interest stage from the Place Based Capital process and replace it with early, personalised support for each project proposal. Projects will have access to online support sessions both in small groups and on a 1-1 basis. This will help clarify any questions and project feasibility up front and plan support for projects as proposals are developed.
7. There is also work to do to increase the role and purpose of the Advisory Panel. This will be co-designed with panel members.
8. We will have a larger communication plan for phase 2 and it will include information sessions early on for potential applicants.

## Thank You

The Community Choices team would like to thank everyone who was involved in the first Pilot of Community Choices; applicants, project supporters, elected members, partners, Health and Social Care colleagues and Advisory Panel members. Your active participation and your feedback throughout is contributing to the development of local communities and a co-designed Community Choices Programme that works to meet everyone's needs.

We look forward to ongoing learning and improvement and lots of opportunities for fun and community resources being created during an unprecedented time of uncertainty.

31 October 2021



## Appendix 1- Community Choices - Pilot Phase 1 Evaluation

### Consultation on Recommendations

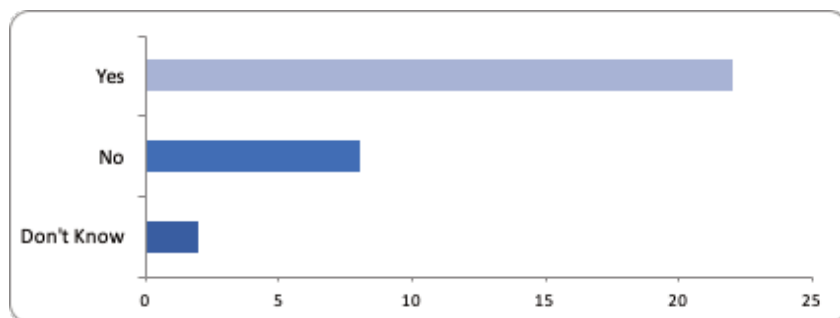
<https://say.falkirk.gov.uk/corporate-housing-services/a909afc2>

This survey was sent to applicants and elected members to test the findings of this report and inform elected member decision making on the proposed changes.

This report was created on Thursday 10 September 2021 at 17:00

Responses to this survey: 32

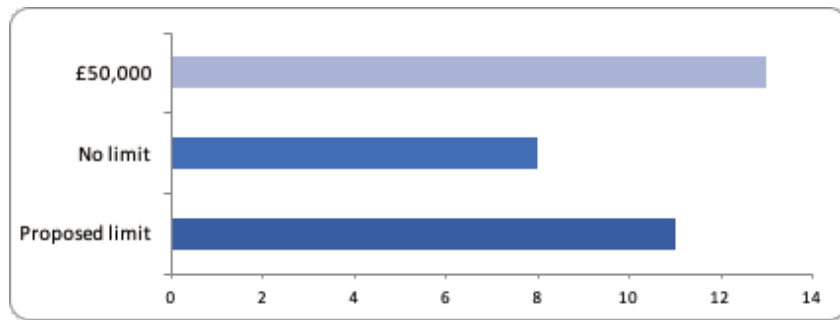
**Question 1: In pilot Phase 1, votes were cast on a Ward basis. This means voters could only vote on projects in Wards where they lived. For pilot Phase 2, should we introduce a Falkirk-wide voting category, for projects which aim to benefit people from across the Council area?**



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	22	68.75%
No	8	25.00%
Don't Know	2	6.25%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

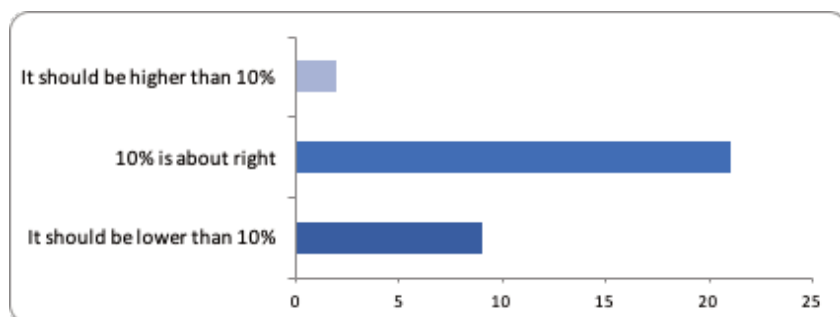


**Question 2: In the Place-Based Capital programme, should there be a limit on how much each project can apply for?**



Option	Total	Percent
£50,000	13	40.62%
No limit	8	25.00%
Proposed limit	11	34.38%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

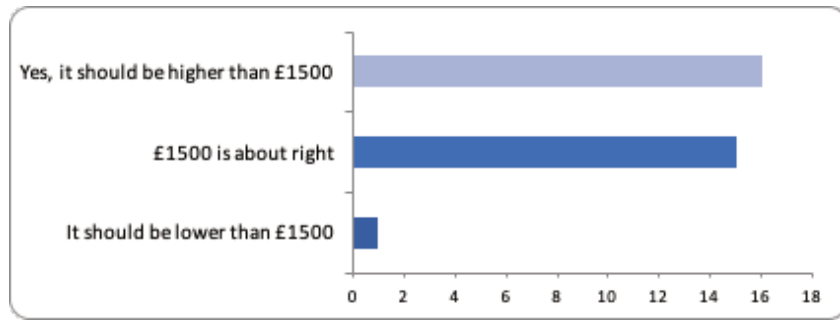
**Question 3: In pilot Phase 1, for bids to be successful, they had to secure a minimum of 10% of the eligible votes cast in that Ward. Do you agree with this limit?**



Option	Total	Percent
It should be higher than 10%	2	6.25%
10% is about right	21	65.62%
It should be lower than 10%	9	28.12%
Not Answered	0	0.00%



**Question 4: In pilot Phase 1, the limit for bids in the Small Grants Programme was £1500. Should this be changed?**



Option	Total	Percent
Yes, it should be higher than £1500	16	50.00%
£1500 is about right	15	46.88%
It should be lower than £1500	1	3.12%
Not Answered	0	0.00%