The Democratic Society
Better democracy, everywhere

Learning Report

Digital Participatory Budgeting in Scotland

January 2019

This report shares key learning from The Democratic Society's delivery of the support programme for digital participatory budget (PB) in Scotland in 2016 - 2018.

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The Democratic Society

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The Democratic Society (Demsoc) works for more and better democracy, where people and institutions have the desire, opportunity and confidence to participate together. We work to create opportunities for people to become involved in the decisions that affect their lives and for them to have the skills to do this effectively. We support governments, parliaments and any organisation that wants to involve citizens in decision making to be transparent, open and welcoming of participation. We actively support spaces, places and processes to make this happen.

Introduction

Councils and community organisations in Scotland are being encouraged to use digital elements as part of their participatory budgeting processes, with support from The Democratic Society (Demsoc). This work is part of a wider Scottish Government programme to extend and develop the use of participatory budgeting by local authorities and communities.

Since 2014 the Scottish Government has been supporting and promoting participatory budgeting (PB) as a tool for community engagement and as a resource to build on the wider development of participatory democracy in Scotland. The Scottish Government has identified that PB supports the principles of Public Service Reform and complements the aspirations for the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 which gives communities more powers to take forward their own priorities and ambitions. It can also help deliver the Public Sector Equality Duty by advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between different groups.

The integration of digital elements in PB processes has been identified as a way to widen involvement in decision making, gather more data about that involvement, and to bolster councils' and community groups' expertise in using digital engagement and decision making tools.

What does this report do?

This short report summarises Demsoc's learning from its involvement in the programme so far. We summarise the digital PB programme to date, draw out insights from the programme and highlight key learning.

In our learning section, we outline findings and suggest solutions, concluding that the future direction of PB should be supported by a shift in approach, away from support on a project-by-project basis, towards a wider infrastructural support programme.

These recommendations have the particular aim of taking PB to the next level - towards the goal of having a minimum of 1% council budgets subject to Community Choices budgeting.

PB is one piece of a much wider change in culture and practice and should be seen in the context of the development of democratic engagement and participatory practice in Scotland as a whole.

Who is this report for?

This report is written for councils, community groups, the Scottish Government and a wider community of interest around participatory budgeting in Scotland. It is there to help people involved in the PB programme to understand more about the work we've done on digital PB - and to help identify where things have worked well, not so well, and how they can be improved.

Overview of the Digital PB programme: 2016-18

In 2016, the Scottish Government commissioned Demsoc to make recommendations on the uptake of digital PB, and to identify a set of tools councils and community groups across Scotland could use.

Demsoc were then recommissioned for phases two, three and four to actively help support councils and community groups to start their journey on using digital PB. The table below summarises the progress of the work to date. Phases three and four overlapped so are merged here.

	Project
Phase 1: 2016 **Initial investigation**	• Digital Tools and Scotland's Participatory Budgeting Programme: a report into the suitability of digital tools for PB in Scotland. Funded by the Scottish Government.
Phase 2: 2016 to 2018 **Councils and neighbourhoods establish and experiment with digital PB**	• Aberdeen City Council: 'UDecide' • Aberdeenshire Council: 'Your Voice Your Choice' • Angus Council: 'Your Budget Your Choice' • City of Edinburgh Council & Leith Neighbourhood Partnership: 'Leith Decides' • Fife Council: 'Oor Bit' • Glasgow City Council: 'Our Place Fund' • Spirit of Ruchill and Possilpark: 'Spirit Marketplace'
Phase 3 and 4: 2017 onwards **Digital PB develops**	• Argyll and Bute Council: 'Growing Gaelic' • Argyll and Bute Council: 'Supporting Communities Fund; • Dundee City Council: 'Dundee Decides' • Scottish Borders Council: 'Localities Bid Fund' • Shetland Islands Council: 'Shetland Community Choices'

We are presently engaged on phase five of the project and learning will be reported at a later date.

Phase 1: Research and Scoping

In this phase, we concentrated on identifying appropriate tools through engagement with officers from 18 Scottish local authorities working on PB. We sought to understand their needs, future expectations and aspirations for using digital PB.

We then developed seven criteria for assessing digital tools in order to identify those most appropriate for supporting PB in Scottish local authorities. These criteria were:

- Ability to deliver key aspects of a PB process for a council, such as idea generation, deliberation, and voting
- Ability to integrate with offline PB processes
- Ease of use for the public
- Ease of setup and reuse by administrators
- Active support and development from supplier or open source community
- Record of previous successful implementations
- Ability to provide demonstration versions.

In addition to these tool-specific criteria, Demsoc looked at the cost of the tools, and voter verification processes – given a need to find a balance between enabling engagement and ensuring that voters are local and only able to vote in the designated way (i.e. only once). Tools that were not used or maintained for a significant period of time were scored down, as were tools that made heavy assumptions about a single approach to PB.

In total, 60 digital tools were briefly assessed, with a shortlist of six created for deeper consideration. A report was published and this summarised the different options available and evaluated each of the six tools for their strengths and weaknesses.

A copy of this report can be accessed at demsoc.org/pb-research

The next phase of work involved facilitated workshops with staff from six councils; each council explored one of the shortlisted the software options using specially designed demonstration websites. The purpose was to further understand how these tools could support PB processes within these councils and to gauge whether, based on the demonstration version of the software, the council felt purchasing the tool itself would be of value.

Digital Tools shortlisted for comparison

	Dialogue delib.net/dialogue	For idea generation, discussion and prioritisation of ideas and projects.
	Your Priorities citizens.is	For idea generation, discussion and prioritisation of ideas and projects.
	Open Active Voting citizens.is	Suitable for voting to allocate funding to projects.
	Participare participare.io	For idea generation, discussion of ideas and voting to allocate funding to projects.
	Democracy21 en.d21.me	For voting to allocate funding to projects.
	Zilino zilino.com	For co-production of ideas and in-depth deliberation and discussion of ideas to receive funding.

Observations

- A successful use of digital engagement will ensure a wider range of voices are involved in PB processes – allowing individuals to engage at a time that suits them, with some significant benefits for rural and island-based communities
- Digital engagement cannot and should not replace offline PB engagement, but is an important complement to offline processes
- There is no single digital tool that can be recommended as a "one size fits all" solution, as the needs for each council are diverse and the market has not developed to meet these needs. Instead, each council must select a digital tool that best fit their own aspirations and plans for PB, also taking into account the time, resources and expertise required.

Phases 2, 3 and 4: Digital Tools for Participatory Budgeting in Scotland

The Scottish Government then invited Demsoc to develop this work through the creation of the 'Digital Tools for PB in Scotland Programme'. The Programme supports the adoption of digital elements in PB processes, opening up the process to more people and more ideas. Demsoc helped Local Authorities and Community Organisations to gain access to the online platforms for their chosen digital tool, with a small number of days' support to use as they saw fit – most usually in helping with set up.

The programme has supported 12 councils and four community groups, geographically located from Shetland to The Borders and each with differing aims and aspirations. The programme has so far enabled over 33,000 people to participate in PB processes in Scotland using digital tools.

Projects supported during phases 2 to 4

	Project	When	How we helped	What happened
P H A S E 2	**Angus Council: 'Your Budget Your Choice'** Case study: https://bit.ly/2RmEO5Q	Summer 2016	▪ Support to select, embed and test a digital platform. ▪ Tool selection workshop run with members of the community and council staff.	▪ Fund available: £20,000 ▪ 27 user submitted ideas online ▪ 15 ideas made offline that progresses to an online vote ▪ 21 comments posted on ideas ▪ £20,000 made available through PB.
	City of Edinburgh Council & Leith Neighbourhood Partnership: 'Leith Decides' Case study: https://bit.ly/2DDnSEC	Autumn 2016	▪ Support to select, embed and test a digital platform. ▪ Delivered training that introduced the digital tool & guided participants through the process for set up, administration, moderation, & verification.	▪ Fund available: £44,184 ▪ Numbers voting were higher than ever before in the history of Leith Decides. ▪ 736 people voted online; 767 offline.

Fife Council: 'Oor Bit' Case study: https://bit.ly/2B6xF4D	Oct to Nov 2016	▪ Support to select, embed and test a digital platform. ▪ Demsoc support included promoting the process on Facebook and Twitter, mapping out local groups and pages to contact, & providing the council's communications team with draft tweets.	▪ Fund available: £250,000 ▪ 'Your priorities' used for idea generation. 'D21' used for voting. ▪ £250,000 pot made available ▪ 99 online ideas generated ▪ 568 online votes; 838 offline. (In comparison the 2015 process received 867 responses) ▪ 76.9% of respondents to an online survey thought the voting site was easy to use.
Aberdeen City Council: 'UDecide'	Nov 2016 to March 2017	▪ Support to select, embed and test a digital platform.	▪ Fund available: £82,500 per locality. ▪ 3 separate processes run in 3 different localities. ▪ 3694 people participated in the PB processes; 722 online. ▪ Feedback survey: 86% of respondents found the platform easy to use ▪ 79% agreed the PB process empowered them to make changes in their communities.
Spirit of Ruchill and Possilpark: 'Spirit Marketplace' Case study: https://bit.ly/2FUFw9p	Feb to March 2017	▪ Support to select, embed and test a digital platform. ▪ Support included attending an offline PB event to help participants submit online votes.	▪ Online voting phase conducted, with idea generation conducted solely offline. ▪ 913 voted online, 94 chose to instead use paper

			• ballots provided at the voting event. (9.4% of the population of Ruchill and Possilpark). • 81% of survey respondents agreed that the website was easy to use.
Aberdeenshire Council: 'Your Voice Your Choice'	June 2017	• Support to select, embed and test a digital platform.	• 241 ideas generated • 3289 registered voters • 2388 participants casting 12173 votes
Glasgow City Council: 'Our Place Fund'	Jan 2018	• Support to select, embed and test a digital platform.	• 5228 registrations to the site • 69 proposals submitted.
P H A S E 3 & 4	**Shetland Islands Council: 'Shetland Community Choices'** More info: shetland.gov.uk/pb/ shetland_community_choices.asp	March 2017	• Support to select, embed and test a digital platform.
	Argyll and Bute Council: 'Growing Gaelic' More info: https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/growinggaelic	April to May 2017	• Support to select, embed and test a digital platform.
	Argyll and Bute Council: 'Supporting Communities Fund' More info: https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/news/2018/mar/ have-your-say-supporting -communities-fund	Spring 2018	• Support to select, embed and test a digital platform.

Note: The last column for the Phase 3 & 4 rows:

- Shetland Islands Council: • Fund: £100,000 • Projects voted on came from a prior community prioritising exercise • Online vote accompanied by a postal vote option. • 5730 votes cast, from more than 1,000 voters.
- Argyll and Bute Council 'Growing Gaelic': • Fund: £15,000 • 889 people voted via the Open Active Voting tool • 95% of survey respondents agreed the website was easy to use
- Argyll and Bute Council 'Supporting Communities Fund': • 159 ideas generated using the 'Your Priorities' site

Scottish Borders: 'Localities Bid Fund'	Feb 2018	▪ Support to select, embed and test a digital platform.	▪ 6571 online votes; ▪ 9139 paper ballots
More info: https://scotborders.citizenspace.com/customer-communities/localities-bid-fund-evaluation/			

Reflections and learning

The work on this programme has, so far, achieved a great deal. This may be the only digital engagement programme of its kind in the UK - where a set of different digital tools were implemented by a range of councils specifically to devolve decision making. Given the novelty of the work it is no surprise that it tested the resolve, capacity and ingenuity of everyone involved. Even small successes in this context are considerable - and each implementation is rich with learning. Of course, because councils, community groups - as well as the Scottish Government, partners and stakeholders including Demsoc - are all part of that journey, the learning is diverse, and difficult to summarise. Our reflections are just part of a bigger learning exercise and should connect to other experiences elsewhere in the programme.

We have made a number of observations and grouped them under headers for preparation and readiness; training; infrastructure and policy; community organisations; and opportunities and challenges for sustainability.

Preparation and readiness

While the support Demsoc provided through this programme was well received, it became apparent that a key prerequisite to successful adoption of PB was the preparatory work.

Demsoc provided help focussed largely around the setup of the digital tool and getting the software up and running, but this did not address the broader context in which the digital tool was to be used.

Delivering a clear message together

Observation	Explanation
Different organisations delivered different elements of support for the PB programme. This ensured a rich set of skills and expertise, but sometimes made it hard to maintain a unified approach in the advice and support we were offering.	Sometimes we felt that advice differed subtly between different parts of the programme and this could confuse the learning and support that was being provided.
Learning	
It's clear that we have the opportunity to work collaboratively as part of a broader team - where we come together, as representatives of different organisations, to work on collective assets and activities. This is already informing the new phase of PB - with a number of collective activities helping us to work more closely.	

Bolting on

Observation	Explanation
Because we were keen to present digital PB to clients who were already doing traditional PB, it sometimes arrived too late in the process to be really valuable.	We introduced digital as a way to enhance and augment face-to-face events - as part of existing PB processes. But in some cases, that meant digital support arrived late on in the design process. For example, early decisions about voting approaches could become challenging because not all platforms supported all mechanisms of voting.
Learning	
There is an opportunity to see digital as part of the delivery of PB from the start - both in terms of the way it can augment existing processes but also how digital platforms can inform the design of a PB process.	

Matching technology and support to need

Observation	Explanation
The levels of support and the tools that we introduced didn't always match up to the needs that organisations had, or where they were on their journey to using digital PB.	Our support was focussed just on digital participation, but sometimes organisations were simply getting to grips with how to best use participatory budgeting as a process itself. Therefore, the relatively sophisticated digital participation platforms we focussed on were not always the most suitable. In some instances, they may have needed platforms with less specific, or specialist, functionality. Equally, sometimes, community groups and councils were offered one-to-one support when what they needed was to embed PB skills and approaches before they got more in-depth help.
Learning	
We could be thinking about ways to support organisations to enable them to take early and simple steps that build towards digital PB. This will require a more subtle approach, one that informs and encourages the development of digital engagement capabilities - delivering a broader, better set of literature, as well as a more flexible approach to the training and support we provide.	

There will always be a need for bespoke, 1-to-1 support, but the need for this should be minimised to support value for money and financial sustainability. The technologies we talk about and introduce shouldn't just concentrate on participatory platforms - but help to identify core benefits for participatory practice.

Organisational readiness

The programme provided swift access to new digital tools for enhancing PB within councils and support for delivering the process. But the implications of the work and the support it required, had implications for a number of different teams across local authorities.

Observation	Explanation
More could have been done to allow strategic planning for PB across teams within councils.	A wide variety of teams are affected by PB, including digital, communications and legal. Without strategic planning it is hard to work across these teams in a busy council. Such planning could also provide a context for considering how to improve digital engagement more generally.
Learning	
Councils may be able to build in strategic planning for PB across teams. This could be used as an opportunity to also learn how cross-team working is helpful for running other participatory practices.	

Reflection

In order to realise the full potential of digital engagement through PB, those tasked with delivering the work need support and resources.

Key barriers and enablers identified through our work included:

- A more consistent and embedded approach to 'mainstreaming'
- Leadership - ensuring that there is buy-in at a senior level to supports the implementation of digital PB, including a shared understanding and ambition among elected members.

Shared understanding and ambition at senior level, including elected members, could have been stronger, and would have helped achieve a consistent, and embedded approach across councils. But delivering these changes will need more support from the programme - with more careful attention provided to senior leadership, and to officers who are acting as agents for a wider institutional change.

Training

Many of the front-line staff tasked with the implementation of digital PB will also have responsibility for software that requires a level of digital familiarity and skill not always found among officers or in community organisations. In this programme, we also sometimes found that software providers had unrealistic expectations regarding the level of skill and prior knowledge council officials and community organisations had.

Digital skills

Observation	Explanation
We identified a gap in the digital skills needed to get the most out of running an online participation programme - and the skills that local authorities in particular expect officers to have developed.	To run a digital PB programme there's a range of skills you need. They include a basic level of familiarity with using digital and social media tools, and in communicating and being part of a wider community online. These skills are required for getting the most out of a programme - but lie well beyond the basic training to use a digital platform with the primary focus of the training we provided

Learning
There is a need for the programme to understand how these skills can be developed, or sourced elsewhere. Given that they have a much wider application, identifying these skills and building mechanisms for developing these skills will have significant value. Skills include: ▪ writing for the web ▪ interacting with citizens online ▪ moderating online discussion ▪ leveraging social media networks for citizen engagement ▪ collecting and analysing data about online participation ▪ structuring information for clear communication.

Reflection

There is an ongoing tension for many front-line staff at local authorities. Those who were tasked with the implementation of digital PB also often needed to adopt and learn digital skills in a short space of time. In some cases, these were skills they had little introduction to - and may not have been a part of their work before. Some officers responsible for digital PB were already busy and may not have been interested in acquiring digital engagement or technological skills; either lacking headspace or capacity to engage with the topic, not understanding the value or purpose of doing so, not seeing how it related to their role, or otherwise not seeing sufficient time nor incentive for deeper engagement with digital PB.

While the pressures and tensions that community organisations face may be different, there are similarities: volunteers may have little experience of, or interest, in developing digital skills, and the incentives for doing so may seem removed from their interests.

Ultimately, however, we know that digital skills are an increasingly important part of how people are seeking to engage and participate civically. As such, establishing and defining

the appropriate skills for working with communities online - and supporting their development - will be critical.

Infrastructure and policy

A key challenge to our work was the technology that local authorities provided - and the policy restrictions that councils placed on technology. Three issues were evident:

1. Outmoded or legacy software infrastructure
2. Policy restrictions on staff use and/or locking down of hardware
3. A failure to equip staff with standalone devices.

Outmoded or legacy software infrastructure

Observation	Explanation
Legacy IT infrastructure made it harder for council staff to use digital PB to its full effect.	Outdated web browsers made it harder for staff to view the full functionality of PB platforms, while restricted email storage made it harder for council staff to collect application forms.
Learning suggestions	

For Demsoc: We may need to demonstrate to councils and others how these issues can prevent staff from getting the most out of the platforms as early as possible. However, this is a wider problem - so addressing workarounds should include more case learning from individual councils themselves.

For local authorities and others: We should be seeking to inform a wider debate about how the government addresses these issues. Individual use-case issues like this may be helpful for structuring wider policy changes.

Policy restrictions and locking down

Observation	Explanation
Council staff were often unable to access digital technology (software and hardware) because of policy restrictions.	A council officer had to work from home to contact a platform provider located in a different country, using Skype, because its use was restricted on the councill network.
Learning suggestions	

By informing local authorities early about the needs individual staff have for this digital engagement work, it may be possible to remove blockages before they become a problem. This might include offering checklists that can be escalated quickly to IT, or by offering specific requirements that are part of a client engagement.

Councils may be encouraged to consider reviewing policy restrictions more broadly, if they view these issues as hampering officers' ability to engage and work with external stakeholders, providers and the public.

Equipment provision

Observation	Explanation
Council staff don't always have access to the technology and tools that can help them to engage online - and help others to do so.	In some cases, council staff have had limited access to smartphones and tablets - which in turn made it harder for them to do digital engagement work in community settings. (It's worth noting: the platforms we used can look quite different on phones to how they look on laptop or desktop computers.)
Learning suggestions	
Workarounds might include the procurement of cheap smartphones, handing out tablets or - again - seeking permission for procurement early in the process.	

Reflection

Local government policies and practices have developed over a long period of time, and their aims and ethos are very different to the emerging digital culture. This new culture relies on interconnectivity, agility and adaptability to operate. But these properties run against key local government IT infrastructure concerns - including security, assurance and control. Similarly, digital culture can force local government to confront forms of 'networked' power. This new form of power may seem at loggerheads to a traditional organisational culture that sees responsibility and power as hierarchical matters.

We can develop workarounds for the barriers that this clash presents. But we have to recognise that our traditional ways of working are embedded and change can't be immediate or even rapid. Rather than blaming personalities, policies or even cultures, we need to record how digital participatory budgeting can identify this challenge and observe how it enables and requires organisations and individuals to adapt to change and to adopt new working practices.

We should seek to inform how this change can happen - by helping officers to confront, explore and navigate the challenge. We should be presenting examples of where this has happened elsewhere and collect evidence for change when we find it.

Community organisations

We saw how community organisations successfully ran localised PB processes and in some cases produce exceptional participation rates. But understanding the requirements these organisations have, and how they can work together with councils, remains a challenge.

Observation	Explanation
We have isolated examples of high participation rates for community organisation-run PB.	In the case of Ruchill and Possilpark in Glasgow, for example, we reported participation rates of nearly 10 percent of the local population. If there are reported high rates of participation from community-organisation run process, we should seek to examine what factors might drive this.

Learning
It's important to explore the factors that may have led to these rates before drawing conclusions. Nonetheless, we know that community organisations can be highly effective at engaging and communicating with residents. Exploring how they do this, and what lessons it might have for councils and other community groups, could be a focus for our work going forward.

Variable connection with local authorities

Observation	Explanation
Community organisations have variable and inconsistent relationships with councils.	There appear to be different relationships between local authorities and community groups doing PB. Some enjoy excellent links, but others reported that the relationships were strained.

Learning
Fostering good links between community organisations and council staff may be a direction of focus for developing better digital PB.

Reflection	Explanation
The requirement within the Community Choices fund that community organisations had to deliver the scheme within a year placed considerable time pressure for planning and delivering PB.	This time pressure sometimes meant there was insufficient time to integrate digital elements into processes.

Learning
Future arrangements should ensure community organisations have the time they need to effectively implement PB.

Reflection

While more focus is being given to mainstreaming PB at local authority level, involving bigger budgets and larger areas, community organisations clearly have a significant part to play in the wider development of digital participatory budgeting across Scotland. They are a vital connection with many communities and, as such, offer routes to harder-to-reach groups as well.

Our work underlined that both funding and relationships with councils presented a challenge to these organisations. Beyond this, there are other challenges - including infrastructure, skills and support - that are common to any organisation attempting to do digital participation. But these are likely to be more severe for volunteer organisations. It is important to establish strong links with the Community Choices funded groups so they can address these challenges with the support, where possible, of local authorities - and a wider community of practice developing around PB and digital PB.

Opportunities and challenges for sustainability

We are entering a new phase for participatory budgeting in Scotland. Local authorities are identifying how they can make one percent of their spending subject to PB, while grappling with the wider implications of making PB an embedded part of local democracy in Scotland. At the same time, digital PB finds itself at a crossroads. Digital providers are seeking to establish themselves, while a number of different models for providing platforms are now available. This presents a set of challenges and questions that need to be addressed in the next phase.

Sustainability for providers

Observation	Explanation

In the last rounds, the digital providers sought to keep their pricing low - as this was part of a pilot phase. With the scaling up of development, financial and commercial sustainability will be more of a concern for providers	The technology providers for these rounds were happy to provide support in the early phases, as it enabled experimentation and the development of new features. But the rates agreed with them in 2015 will need to be addressed in the future. For some, income will be the most important factor, but for open source providers it may also be about locating support for the tools from within Scotland.

Learning
Understanding the needs of different providers, and working with them to make their provision more sustainable will require significant thought. Pricing is likely to increase - but we may also need to discuss how open source tools are adopted and contributed to here by the local authorities using them.

Emerging models

Observation	**Explanation**
Across different councils there is a wide variety of different appetites and an interest in quite distinct approaches to digital PB.	During the phases of digital PB we've seen a wide variety of approaches develop. Firstly, there are different models for the delivery of platforms for digital PB. These include: ▪ Shared services ▪ Open source options ▪ Self-developed solutions ▪ Off-the-shelf procurement ▪ Single, country-wide procurement. We are already aware that different options are being tested - and COSLA, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, with our support, is engaging in testing Consul (an open-source tool). There is interest in testing a single platform for all councils. On the supplier side, there are also a number of differing options emerging, with different models of support for open-source tools - and a range of proprietary platforms also available.

Learning
We need to assess the different opportunities digital PB provides for enhancing participation and the emerging - often quite distinct - models for doing that. That should look at the institutional consequences they bring, their likelihood of sustainability, and start to build a picture of these models.

Voter validation, data and security

Observation	Explanation
Digital PB and in particular online voting presents a series of legal and ethical challenges.	Some local authorities reported concerns about how voter identity can be established and how digital PB can be compliant to data protection regulation. In particular, GDPR was being introduced during the programme and some authorities expressed concerns about how their PB processes online could meet the new regulation.

Learning
Voter identity, verification and security touches upon issues that are both regulatory - and encompass storage of data, data privacy and voting regulation - and ethical, including how to balance the needs of an accessible open vote with a fair, trustworthy process. Local authorities have the resources, expertise and processes to assure GDPR is met - so this may be more about exploring the challenges and understanding how practitioners are successfully negotiating them, to share widely. Some guidance from trusted legal sources and creation of resources or workshop spaces to explore these issues would be worthwhile.

Embedding digital as culture change: the longer term

Observation	Explanation
Different organisations have different perspectives on the longer-term change that digital PB represents.	Different councils and community groups had different perspectives on PB. For some, digital PB tools were useful for a specific project - this was the perspective of the four community groups who adopted PB. In these cases, there was no particular drive to use PB more consistently. In some instances, organisations are at the beginning of their exploration into introducing PB: there were a number of councils with whom exploratory conversations were held, who felt unable to adopt digital PB approaches at this point in time.

Learning
There is a need for councils to be able to develop at different speeds - with councils that are developing innovative practice encouraged to do so and able to call upon support and guidance in the way that they need it. Others simply wish to move more slowly, embedding PB skills and approaches internally first as offline processes before thinking about the digital engagement aspect.

Reflection

The options for longer-term sustainability for the next phase of the digital PB programme require greater evaluation. For procurement of a platform, for example, options can be addressed at different levels - local authorities, groups of local authorities or government could all choose to procure digital platforms. But participation platforms are likely to deliver best value when they are fully integrated into council consultation and engagement processes. This will make the cost of an annual license more economically viable, but in turn may require a more exacting, detailed and thought-through procurement process.

Open-source software offers an alternative model that may appear lower cost, but make different demands on resource and investment. With perhaps a higher initial upfront implementation cost, this approach becomes more sustainable as the authority gains experience in maintaining the software, and develops the skills to use and further develop it. But it can also require an investment in time and resource from a wider open-source development community.

We are also aware that local authorities and community organisations are each developing their own approaches to and demands of digital PB - and moving at different speeds. There are significant benefits from allowing these approaches to continue to emerge. As councils and community organisations innovate, we are likely to learn more about how digital participation can be adopted more comprehensively - and gather a more detailed understanding of the different demands councils have of digital PB and digital participation. Suppliers will also have the opportunity to continue to develop their tools for Scottish partners. In turn, we have much to do - still - to develop common best practices for digital PB and share them across Scotland, all of which can help to inform the development of a platform or platforms in the future.

We should also note that councils that want to use digital as part of a wider culture change need the opportunity to develop and learn in a more innovative way - and this should include support and development that allows them to do this. Nonetheless, some councils are likely to embrace a common platform approach immediately if it was provided, particularly if it removes barriers of cost and resource. We should be mindful of the significant technical barriers in the way of such a development. These development challenges should be part of the thinking and research for the next phase of the programme.

Similarly, local authorities are grappling with and learning about how to establish practice for online voting. This emerging practice is new to local authorities in the UK, and there is the need to gather learning from elsewhere - and within the civic participation field - to begin to develop a common understanding on how data verification, data and online participation can be managed legally and ethically.

Conclusion

The Digital Tools for Participatory Budgeting programme has established in Scotland that local authorities and community groups are in isolated examples able to carry out online participative processes, with online voting and deliberation. But there are significant challenges if this early - and groundbreaking - work is to be repeated with regularity and to eventually become a mainstream activity for all communities and local authorities in Scotland.

For this to happen, local authorities and community groups will need to have access to assets, best practice, regulatory and ethical advice and the necessary guidance to run and commission online digital participation. Supporting this, there will need to be a wider infrastructure that includes online platform options, different options for commissioning - and confidence all of this will be accessible, easy to do and reliable. Crucially, this infrastructure will need to be available and sustainable over the longer term.

This infrastructure is, of course, already in development. The PB Scotland website, managed by the Scottish Community Development Centre, shares learning and practice and works to inform a growing group of practitioners across Scotland about how this is developing. Our work is helping local authorities to explore and develop the skills to do and to commission and develop their own infrastructure for digital participation. COSLA, meanwhile, is working across local authorities, helping to identify, voice and satisfy needs for participatory budgeting that are emerging from authorities.

As we move towards a more mainstream approach, it is natural that these efforts should inform each other. But ensuring this happens to the greater benefit of the programme should, also, take more of our time and effort. Looking forward, it will require us to develop a better shared understanding of how we work together. We will need to honestly reflect on the demands PB and digital PB are presenting. And we will need to communicate these across the wider partnership team - and to key stakeholders across Scotland.

Underpinning this, our evaluation processes - and our ability to reflect and identify good practice will all need to develop. So far, we are aware that while there are isolated examples of success, there needs to be a more developed framework for recording and analysing digital processes beyond the simple data that a digital PB process produces. Similarly, as there is much to learn from Scotland, we can do more to lean from around the world, where digital participation practice is often more embedded.

Perhaps the greatest challenge, however, will be in identifying how we move towards a role that allows local authorities to explore and learn from doing digital PB themselves. This will mean moving away from our position as teachers of technology to guides for better digital practice.