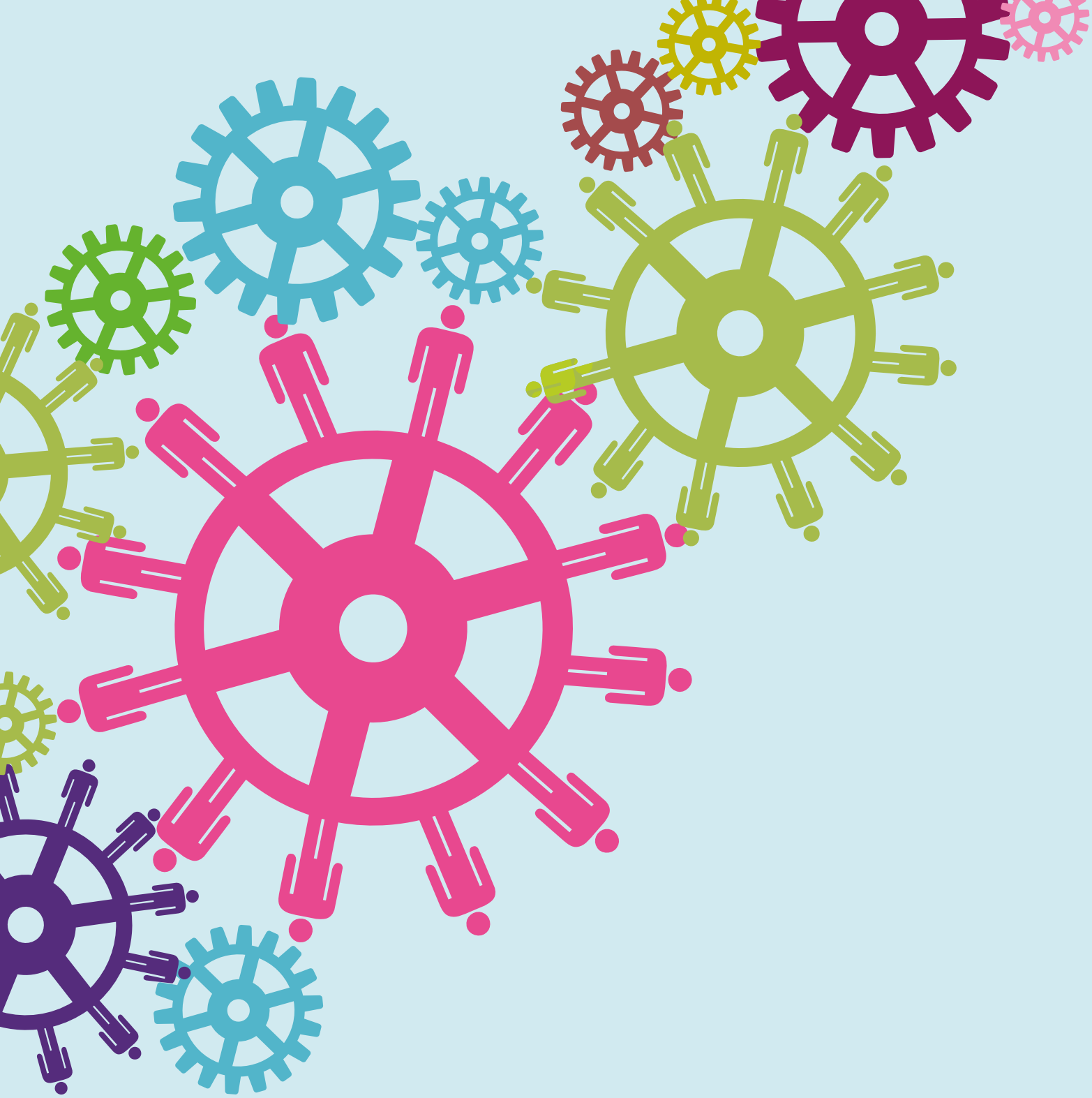




# **TAK£500+ EVALUATION AND LEARNING REPORT SUMMARY**

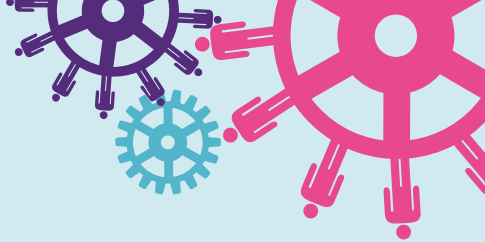
**OCTOBER 2024**



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# FOREWORD

**We are delighted to present this Learning and Evaluation Report on our community planning partnership's third Participatory Budgeting (PB) project. We continue to see a growing appetite for Participatory Budgeting in the borough. Voters of all ages think it is important for the public to have a say in how public money is spent and Tak£500+ applications have increased by over 50% since the last project.**

The report shows us that, again, we achieved what we set out to do. Local people decided where investments were made to meet local needs. Countless community connections were made at the decision events and through the projects delivered across the borough. The Take 5 Steps to wellbeing public health message was promoted and brought to life through the communications, the decision events and the projects.

The success of Tak£500+ is due to the commitment and expertise of local communities who put forward ideas and came to vote at the events. There is a rich community life in this borough, we saw applications from schools; sports clubs; heritage, rural, older peoples' and women's groups. Arts, crafting, residents' and education groups applied. Food and hygiene banks, social enterprises, churches, men's' sheds and groups set up for first aid, walking and play also got involved. The project has shone a light on the countless volunteers and staff in the Community, Voluntary and Social Enterprise sector who do important work in their communities. We thank you for the work that you do to promote the wellbeing of people in ABC and make the borough a great place to live.

We would also like to thank the community planning partnership's PB Working Group who designed and implemented their third borough-wide PB project. It is a great example of partnership working across the community, voluntary and statutory sectors and we are proud of what the group has achieved. Partners have pooled their time, expertise, money and put decision making into the hands of local people who know best what is needed in their communities.

This report is also about making sure that we learn from Tak£500+ and that we carry that learning into our future PB processes. There are 20 recommendations in this report, devised from feedback from applicants, voters, partners and Elected Members. We are grateful to all those who gave their views and shared their experiences of Tak£500+. Our Community Planning Strategic Partnership has endorsed the recommendations in the report and we are committed to building them into future PB processes.

Through our three Tak£500+ PB processes to date 12,660 people aged eight and over have voted to allocate over £215,000 to 255 projects. To maintain and grow PB we need more partners to come on board to contribute their expertise and resources to the process. We believe that PB is one way to deliver the transformation agenda for public services through meaningful public participation in decision making, collaboration towards shared outcomes and continuous improvement. We will be sharing the learning outside the partnership and will welcome new partners to join our work on Participatory Budgeting.



**Colette Rogers**  
PHA, Head of Chair  
of ABC Community



**Catherine McFarland**  
NIHE, Director of Finance,  
Chair of Shared Leadership  
& Community Engagement  
Sub-Committee



**Donna Stewart**  
Craigavon Banbridge Volunteer Bureau,  
Manager Vice-Chair of Shared Leadership &  
Community Engagement Sub-Committee &  
Community & Voluntary Sector Panel

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Tak£500+ Participatory Budgeting (PB) process launched in December 2023 and is the third PB process to be taken forward by Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Community Planning Partnership. The project builds on the achievements and learning from previous PB processes, Tak£500 which took place in 2020 (run online due to Covid restrictions) and Tak£500+ which ran during 2022-2023.

Tak£500+ enables communities to put forward ideas and directly decide how public funds can be best used to address locally defined needs. This year 184 project ideas were put forward and 4286 people from across the borough voted to decide which ideas were funded. 108 projects have been delivered around the Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing public health message.

Involving communities in decisions is important to ABC Community Planning Partnership, both as an outcome itself and also as a way to realise other outcomes in the community plan. For this reason, the partnership has embedded public participation in decision making into its plans, strategies, and governance structures. The Tak£500+ Participatory Budgeting project contributes to both the Confident Community<sup>1</sup> and Healthy Community<sup>2</sup> Outcomes in Connected<sup>3</sup>, the community plan for the borough, and is an action prioritised in the partnership's Community Engagement Strategy<sup>4</sup>.

One of the statistics used by the partnership to measure progress towards the Confident Community Outcome is the percentage of people who feel they have an influence on decisions made in their neighbourhood. Latest figures show that only 19% of people in the borough feel that they have an influence, and this has been decreasing over time<sup>5</sup>. PB is a democratic innovation which goes beyond traditional consultation putting final decisions about budgetary decisions into the hands of the public has been identified as a way to redress these figures.

 **3**  
Participatory Budgeting  
processes since 2020



**ALL** Ideas based on Take 5  
Steps to Wellbeing

 **327**  
projects up  
for public vote

 **12,660**  
voters aged 8  
and over

 **255**  
projects funded

 **£215,193.32**  
of funding allocated

 **41** people from  
**21** organisations make  
up PB Working Group

 **12** partners contributing  
to funding pool

 **383,340**  
social media reach



**19% OF PEOPLE  
IN THE BOROUGH  
FEEL THEY HAVE  
AN INFLUENCE  
IN DECISIONS  
TAKEN IN THEIR  
NEIGHBOURHOOD**

The report shows continued and growing support for PB in the borough. The number of voters and groups taking part has continued to increase year on year, with applications increasing by over 50% compared with the previous project. Voters and applicants continue to feel that the public should have a say in how public money is spent.

Tak£500+ was taken forward by the PB Working Group, with oversight by the Community Planning Strategic Partnership through its Shared Leadership & Community Engagement Sub-Committee. The 29 strong membership of the PB Working Group includes eight statutory and seven community & voluntary sector partners. Effective partnership working has been a feature of each PB process and is explored later in the report.

## AIMS OF THE EVALUATION AND LEARNING REPORT

The aims of the evaluation and learning report are:

- To assess how the project has met the shared purpose set by the PB Working Group
- To assess to what extent the project has met the wider ambitions of the partnership
- To capture learning to inform future PB projects
- To influence regional policy and attract more partners to get involved

The evaluation and learning report is informed by a number of data sources including project statistics; survey responses from voters, applicants (successful and unsuccessful in securing resources through Tak£500+), those who withdrew from the process and reflections from PB Working Group members. The evaluation took place between March and August 2024.

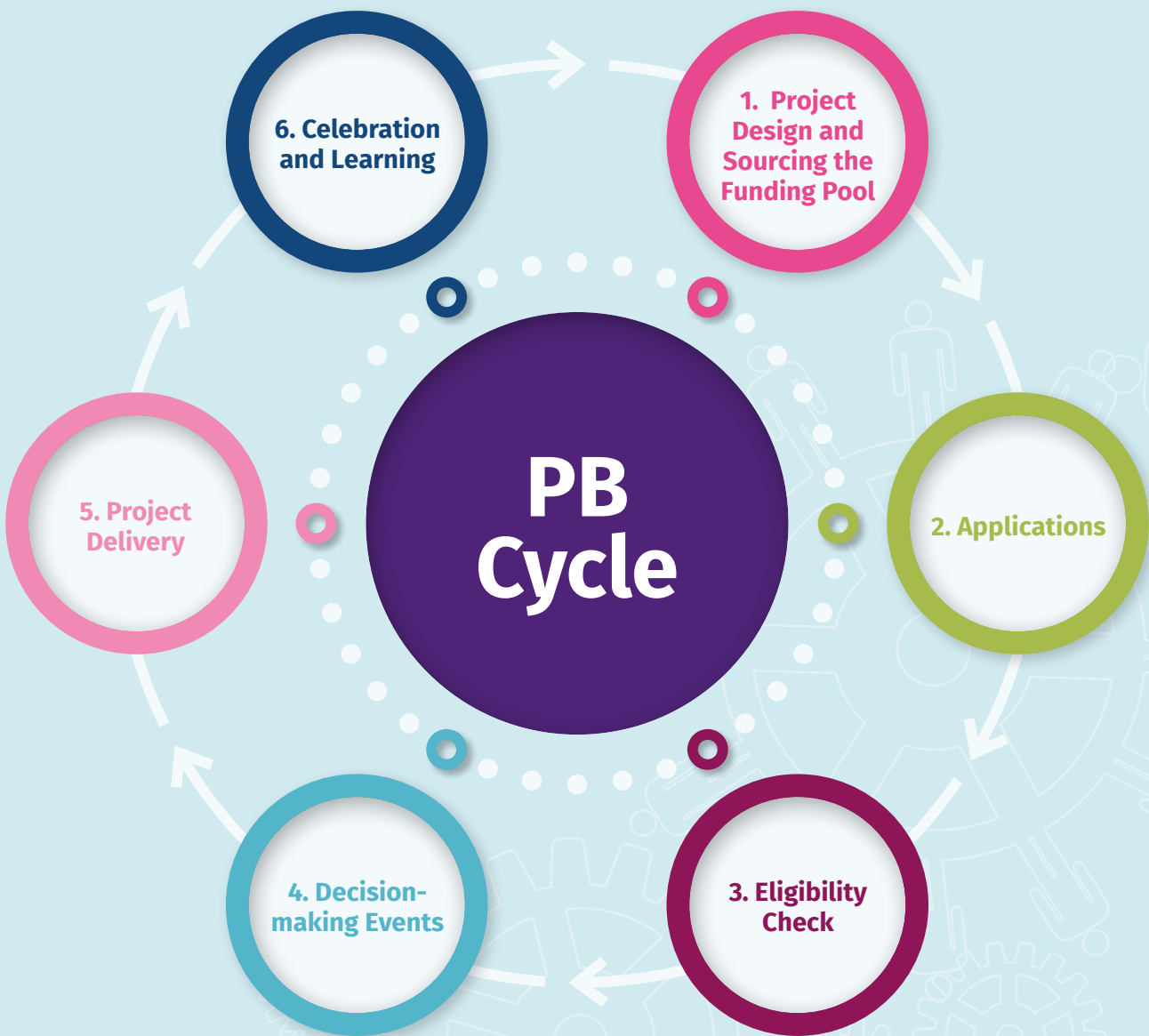
This report is a summary document and the full report is available at this link

[armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk/take500plus](https://armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk/take500plus)

- 1 Confident Community: Everyone has opportunities to engage in community life and shape decisions – we have a strong sense of community belonging and take pride in our area.
- 2 Healthy Community: People are making positive lifestyle choices. They are more resilient and better equipped to cope with life's challenges.
- 3 Connected: A Community Plan for Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough see: <https://www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk/download/9210/community-planning-2018/24006/connected-community-plan-3.pdf>
- 4 Community Engagement Strategy Involving Communities - Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council ([armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk](https://armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk))
- 5 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (ARK) 2020-2022

## 2. TAK£500+ SIX STAGES

Tak£500+ follows the six stage PB cycle developed by the ABC PB Working Group. Any group of at least three people aged eight and over could form a community group and apply for £1,000 to run a project with the support of a sponsor. Projects were to deliver at least one of the Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing. Anyone aged eight and over could vote at the decision events to decide which projects received the money.





### 3. HOW DID THE PROJECT MEET ITS SHARED PURPOSE?

**The PB Working Group set the shared purpose for the project as:**

- To empower all communities and support a sense of ownership for investment and decision-making;
- To better meet needs, as defined by the local community;
- To promote innovation, inclusion and community connections;
- To strengthen partnership working; and
- To promote the Take 5 public health message.

The Learning and Evaluation Report found that, like the partnership’s previous PB projects, Tak£500+ met its shared purpose. Feedback from groups, voters and project partners was overwhelmingly positive. Although feedback from groups who did not get the money was less positive, they feel that the public should have a say in how public money is allocated.

#### TO EMPOWER ALL COMMUNITIES AND SUPPORT A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP FOR INVESTMENT AND DECISION-MAKING



**4286 people** from across the borough attended the decision-making events and voted to allocate **£105,906** to **108 local projects** which they wanted to see happen under the Take 5 public health message.



**3 decision making events** were held showcasing **151 community projects**, representing a **66% increase** from the previous year.



**Any three people aged eight and over** could apply to bring the Take 5 public health message to life.



**70% (108) of projects** represented at the events were funded through the community vote. There were 44 unsuccessful projects.

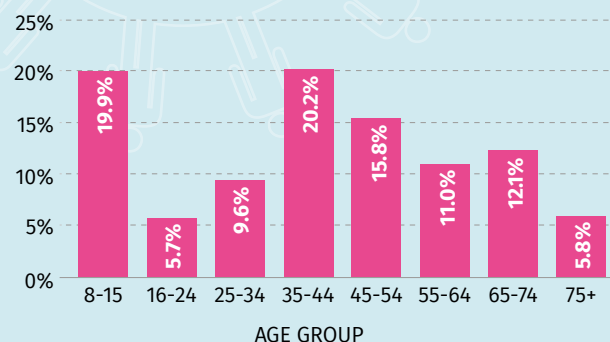


**184 applications** were received, an **increase of 55%** from the previous project.

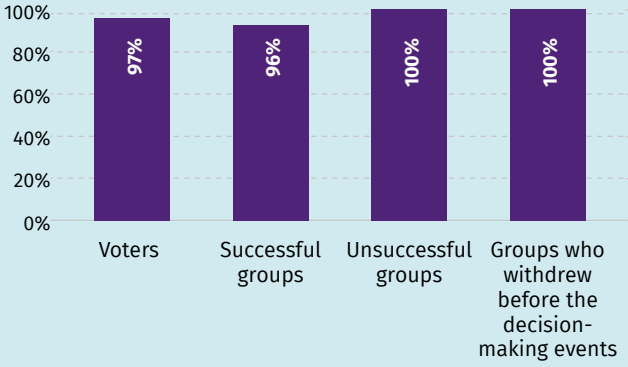
**9% of applications** were from non-constituted groups.

**174 applicants** were invited to attend the decision-making events.

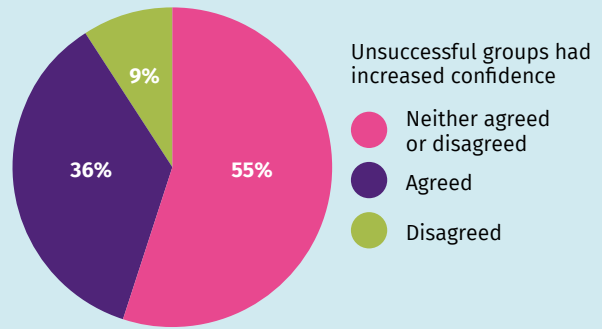
#### Age Category of Voters



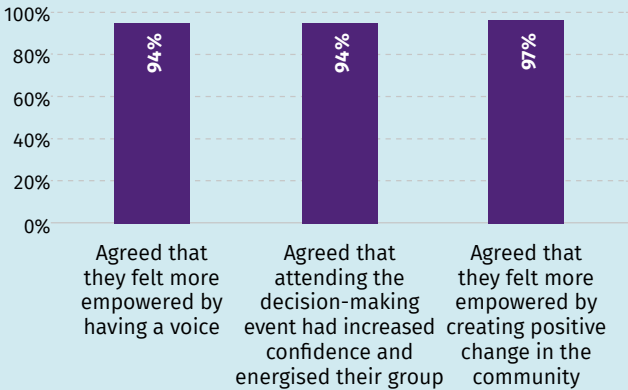
**Voters and community groups, including unsuccessful groups, surveyed think it is important to have a say in how public money is allocated**



**Unsuccessful groups were less likely to agree that they had increased confidence and energised their group or were empowered by having a voice in how resources are allocated**



**Successful community groups felt more empowered by having a voice in how resources are allocated and increased their confidence as a group**



**Groups would like to see more PB happening across the Council area, although unsuccessful groups are less likely to take part again.**

**100%** (42) of successful groups would take part in another PB process.

**83%** (5) of groups who withdrew.

Just under half, **40%** (4) of unsuccessful groups would take part in another PB process.



## TO BETTER MEET NEEDS, AS DEFINED BY THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

### 108 community-led health and wellbeing projects being delivered across the borough.

**90%** (47) of successful group respondents felt they were supported to access resources to address needs and make a positive change in the community.

**95%** (39) of successful groups agreed that they were supported to address needs in the community and make a positive change.

**60%** (6) of unsuccessful respondents felt that there was adequate support to help their group participate in the Tak£500+ process.

*"We feel that you make groups and individuals no matter how small or large make a difference to the community."*

*"It was great for the people to have a choice in matters concerning funding and the appropriate allocation of such funds. I feel thankful that people chose our project as something of need for children in the area."*

*"Imperative that the local community sees where their money is being spent and having a say is primary here. This ensures that people feel involved and a part of the funding."*

## TO PROMOTE INNOVATION, INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

### Voters felt more involved in the community from attending the decision-making events.

**93%** (3980) feel more involved in the community.

### Groups feel that they have raised awareness of their group and are more aware of what is happening in their area.

**100%** (52) of successful groups agreed they have raised awareness of their group.

**96%** (50) of successful groups are more aware of what is happening in their area.

**80%** (8) of unsuccessful groups were more aware about what is happening in their area after participating.

**54%** (6) of unsuccessful groups agreed that they had raised awareness of their group within the community.

### Both successful and unsuccessful groups agreed they had created and strengthened connections.

**94%** (49) of successful groups agreed they had created new connections with other groups or individuals at the decision-making event.

**91%** strengthened connections with other groups or individuals at the decision-making event.

**88%** (45) agreed that they created stronger connections with Council and service providers through being involved in Tak£500+.

**64%** (7) of unsuccessful groups agreed that attending the Market Stall events created stronger connections with the Council and service providers.

**64%** (7) of unsuccessful groups agreed that they had created new connections with groups and individuals in the community.

**64%** (7) of unsuccessful groups agreed that they had strengthened connections with groups and individuals in the community.

## TO STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIP WORKING

A key enabler of Tak£500+ was the strength, commitment and positive partnership working demonstrated by the PB Working Group.



**25 partners** from across seven thematic sectors.



The PB Working Group ranked themselves as **'Very Good' (5.5)** under the Working Together Engagement Standard.



Seven partners pooled approximately **£106,000** for a PB Fund. Council contributed to the pooled budget and provided project management and running costs.



**100%** of PB Working Group respondents feel they are better equipped to plan future PB processes.



All partners supported the **planning and delivery** of the process.

## TO PROMOTE THE TAKE 5 PUBLIC HEALTH MESSAGE

Voters and groups are more aware of the Take 5 public health message and will incorporate the Take 5 message into their daily routine as a result of taking part.

**80%** (3427) of voters were more aware and will incorporate the steps into their daily life.

**100%** (52) of successful groups were more aware of the Take 5 message.

**91%** (10) of unsuccessful groups were more aware of the Take 5 message after taking part in Tak£500+.

Successful groups felt that they had implemented the Take 5 public health message through delivery of their project.

**100%** (42) of successful groups agreed that they had improved mental and physical health and well-being through delivering their project.

**88%** (36) of successful groups agreed that they had reduced Isolation and Loneliness.

**91%** (37) of successful groups agreed that they had developed new skills.

**46%** (50) of successful projects were sport or physical activity related.



Connect



Keep learning



Be active



Take notice



Give

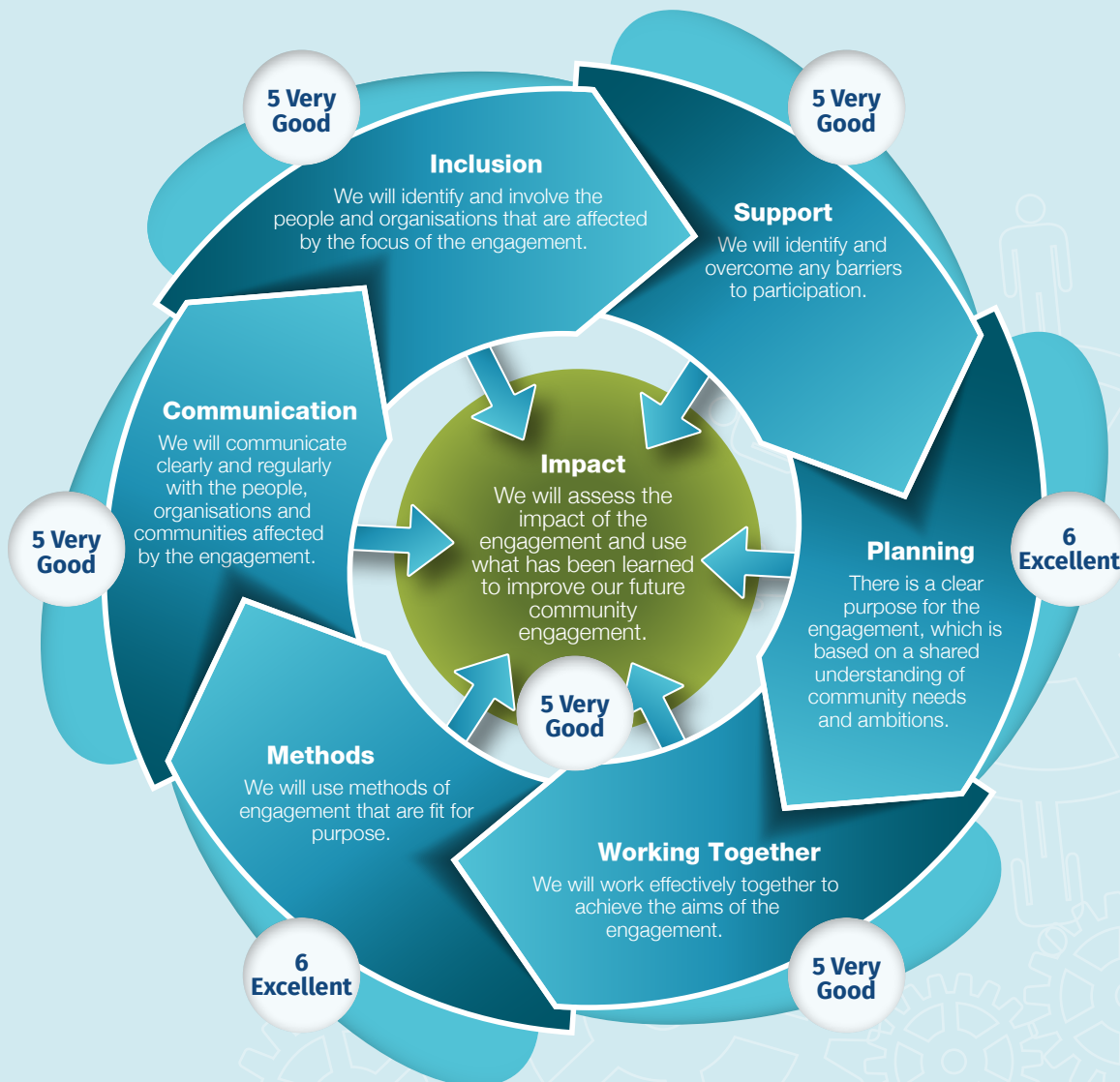


## 4. DELIVERING QUALITY PB

The partnership is committed to delivering quality engagement and has benchmarked PB against recognised standards. As in previous PB projects, the partnership has reflected on the quality of the process. The Standards for Community Engagement<sup>6</sup>, adopted in the Community Engagement Strategy, and the PB Charter<sup>7</sup> for the region have been drawn on by the PB Working Group to reflect and assess the quality of the Tak£500+ PB process.

The PB Working Group scored the process highly across the features and elements of both quality mechanisms as illustrated in the table and star diagram below.

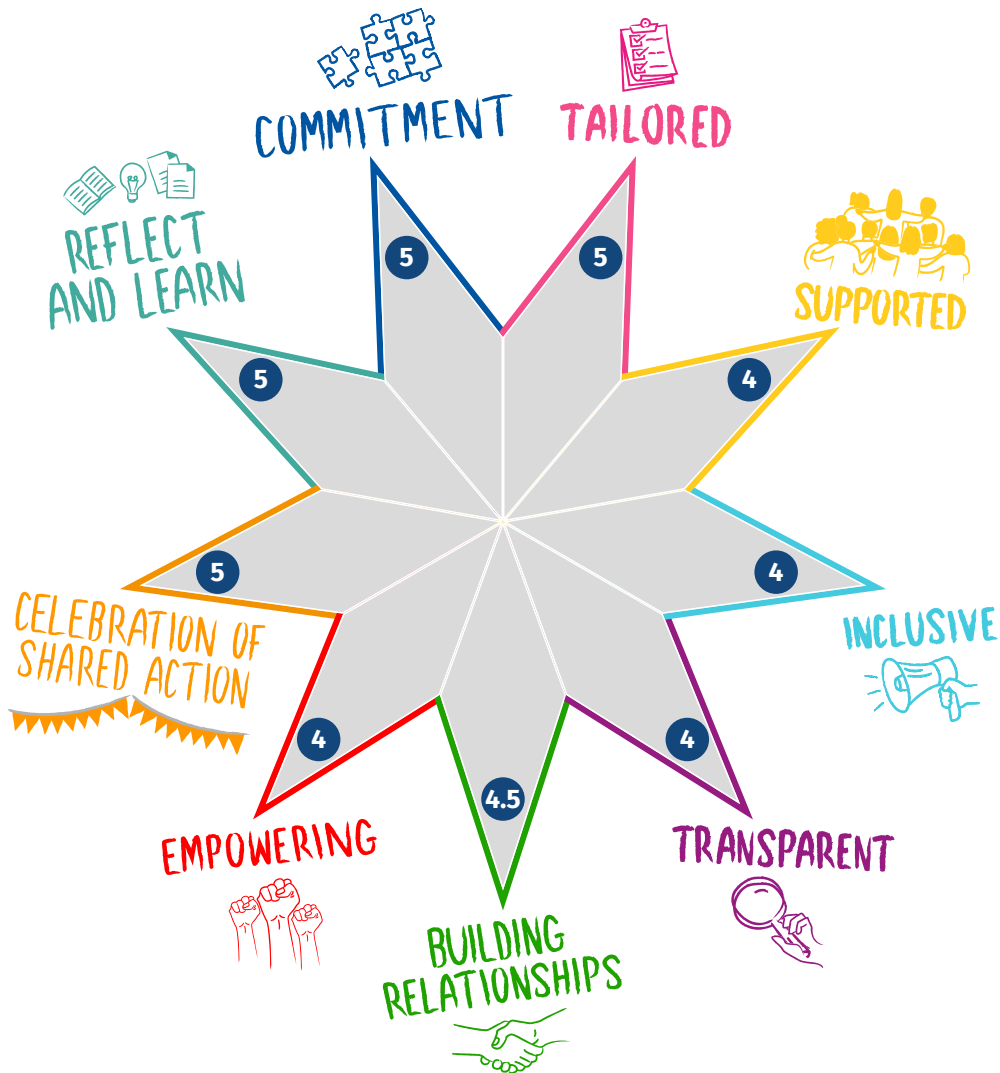
### Standards for Community Engagement and PB Charter<sup>8</sup> Scores



6 <https://www.scdc.org.uk/what/national-standards>

7 [www.participatorybudgetingworks.org/charter](http://www.participatorybudgetingworks.org/charter).

8 Where there was a clear connection between the features they were considered together



'Building Relationships' scored 4.5 by PB Working Group Members

As in previous processes, the PB Working Group have identified areas for improvement, including supporting the process to be even more inclusive and further refining key messaging around Tak£500+.

Significant improvements incorporated into this process include the introduction of online voting at events which has saved the PB Working days of counting paper votes and a funding fayre to support unsuccessful groups with sourcing alternative resources to deliver their projects.

This commitment to continuous improvement has led to positive feedback from voters and applicants within the PB process. A number of responses to the survey of applicants noted that the process is working well with little room for improvements.

*"Not that I can think of. It's an excellent initiative. Our group are very thankful to the Council for helping us and providing the necessary funding."*

*"It's an excellent process and we are so grateful to be part of it!"*

*"Wonderful process Could not be improved. I had no idea about all the amazing work you do in this field until now."*

## 5. WHAT IS THE LEARNING FOR THE PARTNERSHIP'S NEXT PB PROCESS?

Based on feedback from groups, voters and partners the report contains 20 recommendations for the PB Working Group and the Community Planning Strategic Partnership for future PB processes. These build on the recommendations in the previous report and reflect the partnership's commitment to continuous improvement.

The recommendations for the PB Working Group and the wider community planning partnership relate to ongoing work to make the process more inclusive, improved messaging to groups about the process and accommodating growing numbers at the decision events. Recommendations for the Community Planning Strategic Partnership concern facilitating the pooling of partner budgets, disseminating the learning and attracting more partners to the project. The partnership maintains an ambition to scale up PB grant making and exploring mainstreaming.

### Recommendations for PB Working Group

1. The membership of the PB Working Group should be continued to be expanded to include representatives from groupings which have been underrepresented in Tak£500+. This should include people from ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, younger people and non-constituted group representatives.
2. An 'on-boarding' process should be incorporated for new Working Group members.
3. Partners should incorporate Tak£500+ into their budget planning cycles to provide greater and more timely certainty of the resource input they can contribute to the pooled budget.
4. Further consideration should be given to developing a Memorandum of Understanding for partners to streamline pooling of budgets and reporting on a partnership basis. This would provide accountability and clarity to all partners about what each is contributing and gaining from the process.
5. The opportunity for the business sector to invest in Tak£500+ should be explored to secure additional resources or sponsorship for the process to meet the expected continued increase in levels of demand.
6. A question should be added to the application form asking if groups have any specific support or access needs to ensure participation continues to be as inclusive as possible.
7. Efforts should be continued to reach groups that are underrepresented in Tak£500+. This includes younger people aged 16-25 years, people from ethnic minority backgrounds and people with disabilities. Invitations to be sought to attend meetings with these groups.
8. Further messaging in relation to 'online voting' and 'your vote counts' in deciding which project ideas are funded is required.
9. Consider reducing the number of applications that can be made by organisations to respond to increasing demands on the pooled budget.
10. There is a need to consider venues in Craigavon which can accommodate a larger capacity to reduce crowding and create an improved environment for exchange between stall holders and voters. As the interest grows consideration could be given to holding more than one session per area or increasing the number of events and making them more local to accommodate demand.
11. Continue to provide support for participation particularly in relation to online voting.
12. There is a need to continue to target communications and messaging to increase understanding of the 'market stall' and 'online voting' elements of the PB process and to set clear guidelines for the space available to each stall holder.
13. Consider increasing individual funding pots available beyond £1000.



## Recommendations for the Community Planning Strategic Partnership

14. The Community Planning Strategic Partnership should request that partners incorporate PB into their business plans to facilitate timely PB project design and planning.<sup>9</sup>
15. Community Planning Partners should explore options for increasing contributions of their staff time available to the PB Working Group for the delivery and oversight of PB.
16. As a regional exemplar, the Partnership should work towards a Memorandum of Understanding approach to be adopted to reduce bureaucracy and delay in pooling resources between partners for the next PB process.<sup>10</sup>
17. Community Planning Strategic Partnership should link into other regional work on pooling resources, e.g. NICS Collaborate Test and Learn.
18. Further investment for the partnership in a dedicated Community Engagement Support Officer and additional resources are required to embed and grow quality PB across the borough.
19. The Partnership should prioritise time and resources to identify a challenging issue which could benefit from a collective and targeted approach through mainstream PB.
20. It is important to continue to celebrate and promote the positive impacts delivered by Tak£500+ to the community, Community Planning Partners and key stakeholders at a regional level.

9 Confident Community: Everyone has opportunities to engage in community life and shape decisions – we have a strong sense of community belonging and take pride in our area.

10 Healthy Community: People are making positive lifestyle choices. They are more resilient and better equipped to cope with life's challenges.



## 6. FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF PB: TRANSFORMING PUBLIC SERVICES

**Tak£500+ is one example of a successful innovation that has emerged from a community planning partnership. Through the initiative ABC Community Planning Partnership is doing three things well:**

1. Public participation in decision making
2. Collaboration towards shared outcomes
3. Continuous improvement

There is recognition at a regional level that each of these are important in their own right in the improvement and transformation of public services. Tak£500+ brings them together in one initiative and it is hard to imagine this happening in this way without community planning legislation.

Scaling up PB, both grants and mainstreaming, is in line with the current agenda to transform public services. There is an acceptance that public participation, cross-sectoral collaboration and continuous improvement form part of the transformation agenda.

The Statutory Guidance on Community Planning envisages a three-way link between Community Planning and Programme for Government and Community Planning and Neighbourhoods. Tak£500+ delivers neighbourhood, local and regional priorities. The experience of Tak£500+ points towards the benefit of a mechanism to develop or 'incubate' community planning innovations and make the links, both policy and resourcing, with government departments and Programme for Government. This would enable the resourcing and policy direction required to scale up successful innovations, with clear benefits for the population, and contribute to the transformation of public services.





### APPENDIX 1: PB WORKING GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Aileen O'Callaghan, Education Authority

Annette Blaney, ABC Council

Austin Kelly, Clanmil Housing

Cathy Devlin, ABC Council

Chris Leech, Craigavon Area Foodbank

Clive Bowles, Portadown Rugby Football Club

Dawn Vance, Department for Communities

Donna Stewart, C&B Volunteer Bureau

Elaine Devlin, ABC Council

Frances Haughey, ABC Council

Jennie Dunlop, ABC Council

Joan Noade, ABC Council

John Beattie, Triangle Housing

Karen Ross, PSNI

Laura O'Hagan, ABC Council

Lynette Cooke, ABC Council

Mark Doran, ABC Council

Michael Devine, Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Michelle Hazlett, Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Patrick O'Toole, Sport Northern Ireland

Raquel Rodrigues Keenan, Volunteer Now

Sarah Muldoon, Education Authority

Simon Sloan, DfC

Stephanie Rock, ABC Council

Stephen Fields, West Armagh Consortium

Stephen Harland, Ark Housing

Tracey Powell, Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Valerie Maxwell, CYPSP (Children Young People Strategic Partnership)

Vicki Titterington, Linking Generations

The PB Working Group was supported by Louise O'Kane and Sinéad McConnell from Community Places

# TAKE500+

YOUR COMMUNITY, YOUR VOICE, YOUR CHOICE!

Funded by:



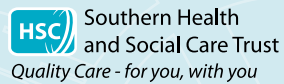
Armagh City  
Banbridge &  
Craigavon  
Borough Council



clanmil  
HOUSING



HSC Public Health  
Agency  
Project supported by the PHA



HSC Southern Health  
and Social Care Trust  
Quality Care - for you, with you

TRIANGLE

Housing  
Executive



QUALITY HOMES  
Ark  
HOUSING  
STRONG COMMUNITIES

Supported by:



RSP Policing & Community  
Safety Partnership  
making Armagh, Banbridge  
& Craigavon safer



COMMUNITY  
& VOLUNTARY  
SECTOR PANEL  
ARMAGH, BANBRIDGE, CRAIGAVON



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An Roinn  
Pobal

Máinistire o  
Communities



CYPSP  
Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership



ea Education  
Authority



Keeping People Safe

Tak£500+ is a project of ABC Community Planning Partnership