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Participatory budgeting: Is it 'doorstep democracy' and does it liberate collective wisdom?

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**Participatory Budgeting: Is it 'doorstep democracy'
and does it liberate collective wisdom?**

David Wynn Davies

**A dissertation submitted in part fulfilment of the
requirements of the University of Chester for the degree
of Masters of Business Administration**

Chester Business School

October 2011

Declaration

As the 'owner ' of the research and the dissertation you must assert its originality - in other words you must declare the work as original and that you have not submitted it for any other academic purpose. Similarly you must declare that the work is yours and that all references to previous work - either by yourself or other authors - are fully referenced.

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Abstract

This dissertation provides an analysis of the increasing role Participatory Budgeting has as a mechanism for the local community to be directly involved in decisions on spending and prioritising public funds at a local level.

Harnessing existing research on the subject and referencing the current topical debate on the Government's 'Big Society', this study reflects on Denbighshire County Council's philosophy of adopting the principles of Participatory Budgeting and provides an analysis of the subject through the adoption of a questionnaire and the observation of a particular local case study.

The dissertation finally identifies key recommendations on the future direction Participatory Budgeting should take within the council supported by a suggested implementation plan.

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I am naturally grateful to my parents who have been an inspiration to my brothers and me and finally to Mair who cajoled me to get on with 'my story' when I found 'more pressing matters to attend to' and who can now finally have the kitchen table returned for its original purpose.

This paper is dedicated to my mother who started the journey with me but sadly passed away before its completion. Diolch o galon.

List of Abbreviations

DCC	-	Denbighshire County Council
CLG	-	Department of Communities and Local Government
SLT	-	Senior Leadership Team, Denbighshire CC.
PBU	-	Participatory Budgeting Unit
WG	-	Wales Government
WPBU	-	Wales Participatory Budgeting Unit

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Chapter One The Research Issue

1.1 Introduction to Chapter One

This dissertation looks to examine the rationale behind Participatory Budgeting (PB) and undertakes a critical review of its use within a Welsh local authority to-date. It will construct arguments and conclusions on its place as a public sector tool for deciding where public funds should be spent within a community and comment on the barriers that exist and the benefits accrued.

1.2 The research question

The title of this dissertation refers to 'doorstep democracy' a term coined by the Department of Communities and Local Government's *2008 white paper 'Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power' (Cm 7427)*, coupled with 'liberating collective wisdom', a term derived from the 'OpenStrategy' paradigm suggested by Driver:

'What communities need are new concepts and tools, and a new paradigm that embraces and encourages consultation and collaboration while building practical strategies, which can be formalised, documented, and acted upon as they evolve. We call this process "liberating collective wisdom", and it's the basis of a new paradigm - and a new tool to implement it – called OpenStrategy' (Driver & Armstrong, 2005)

The aim of this dissertation is to examine the role of PB within a local government context.

To achieve this aim the following objectives will be explored.

- ❖ To understand contemporary thinking on PB and evaluate its impact as a mechanism for devolving public sector financial management to the community they serve.
- ❖ To understand, analyse and critically examine the current approach to PB in local government and in particular Denbighshire County Council
- ❖ Evaluate the impact of PB on the community of Denbighshire.
- ❖ To draw conclusions and if appropriate make recommendations to mainstream PB not only as a core engagement tool within the organisation but its use in the allocation of mainstream budgets.

The researcher is an officer with Denbighshire County Council (DCC) with responsibility for developing and co-ordinating the council's interaction with its residents, its elected members, town and community councils and community organisations through consultation and active engagement. The researcher is also currently 'lead officer' in developing a strategic approach to PB and its introduction in local government in Wales is highly relevant to the Wales Government's (WG) key aim of 'bringing councils closer to the community'.

PB is a relatively new concept within the council, although 'ad hoc' opportunities have arisen when PB has been the vehicle for delivering pilot projects within individual communities. It is seen as a radical distribution of public money and may have its supporters and detractors both internally within the organisation and externally within the broader community.

There has been no analysis of the subject matter previously within the organisation and a critical evaluation would assist the council in its future deliberations on its application and corporate endorsement.

1.3 Justification for the research

In April 2009, DCC adopted its Statement of Intent which sets out the way in which the organisation intends to deliver services. The Statement includes the vision that by 2012 *“Denbighshire will be an excellent Authority providing high quality and efficient services to all its citizens, communities and effective leadership to the Local Service Board and other partners in the County”*.

This is encapsulated in a strategic aim of a *“high performing Council closer to the community”*. Defining what is meant by *‘a high performing Council’* is relatively straight forward by using relevant indicators to chart progress. The second element to this aim, of being *‘close to the community’* is more challenging to both define and to measure success but is essential if the strategic aim that the council has set itself is to be fully achieved.

1.4 Strategic importance of community engagement

The WG in May 2011 published its *‘National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales’* (Participation Cymru) and one of these key principles is that engagement is effectively designed to make a difference and that *‘engagement gives a real chance to influence policy, service design and delivery from an early stage’*. It is in this national context that Denbighshire has identified PB as a key driver for delivering the aspirations of the community it serves.

The WG's agenda underpins the U.K national approach of engagement as espoused by the current 'Big Society' debate and the panacea of 'doorstep democracy' dictating national and local priorities.

The primary purpose of the council is to provide high quality services and a pleasant environment to the residents, those who work and do business in Denbighshire and others who visit the area for leisure or business purposes. Creating a vibrant democracy is more than just going to the polls every four years; listening to and engaging with people is something that should be happening on a continuous basis.

DCC states it will be able to demonstrate that the council is closer to the community when it enables residents:

- to shape their own neighbourhoods;
- to be engaged in the design, delivery and evaluation of services;
- to develop and maintain projects that benefits communities;

1.5 The role Participatory Budgeting can play in Denbighshire

Has PB a significant role to play in this process? It can be argued that at a time when the public sector is going through a period of unprecedented turbulence – reconciling drastically reduced budgets coupled with ever increasing demands on public services – that now is the appropriate time to radically reappraise our approach to public spending. Radical in the context of Denbighshire is a realisation that the spending of public money has been the sacrosanct preserve of those in the job (officers and elected members) rather than those in the know (the local community). Denbighshire's experience of PB has largely revolved around small pilot PB projects where geographic communities or

communities of interest have decided how to spend 'spare' pots of money. This paper will examine the 'quantum leap' required to adopt the radical allocation of mainstream budgets – connecting people with the process of designing local services.

It is hoped the conclusions drawn from this research will illuminate the potential options and direction the council will take in deciding on its level of commitment to the ethos of PB.

1.6 Research methodology

The research methodology for this dissertation is '*qualitative*' rather than '*quantitative*' in its approach due to the nature of the subject. A *quantitative* method would have to be objective and largely based on collecting and using numerical data. This research does not lend itself to given numerical values and the use of mathematical and statistical analysis (particularly due to the anticipated small sampling), rather it is largely based on observation and evaluation and due to the necessary involvement of myself in the process (if merely as an observer) I cannot profess to be truly objective, neutral or disengaged on the subject.

The very nature of PB necessitates the researcher taking a holistic approach – requiring an engagement with groups and events and observing the process without imposing a prescribed specification of variables and hypothesis.

Inevitably I will be adopting a practitioner-researcher role, maximising my knowledge of the organisation and subject matter. However in order to enrich the research and ensure that familiarity does not breed '*assumptions and preconceptions that you carry with you*' (Saunders *et al.* 2009) I will undertake comparative research outside my immediate organisation using secondary data.

The tools of research that will be adopted will include a questionnaire directed to practitioners and participants of participatory budgeting underpinned by observational research of a PB community event. The whole procedure will be through an 'inductive' rather than 'deductive' methodology with an 'action research' approach in order that the results can hopefully inform and promote change within the organisation.

1.7 Outline of the dissertation structure.

The following structure has been adopted.

Chapter One – outline of the research issue and the approach and direction the dissertation will take

Chapter Two – a literature review of relevant and current thinking on the subject

Chapter Three – an overview of the research methodology used and justification for adopting some methods and discarding others

Chapter Four – description of a case study and the process involved in devising and analysing a questionnaire.

Chapter Five – a presentation of the findings of the case study and questionnaire.

Chapter Six – an analysis of the information collated and the conclusions drawn from these findings and their implications.

Chapter Seven – outlining recommendations and an implementation plan

1,8 Summary of Chapter One

This chapter introduces the research issue and outlines the justification for the research and methodology used.

Chapter Two Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to Chapter Two

Having introduced the research subject in Chapter One, this chapter will review literature relevant to the stated aims and objectives and introduce the main theories and concepts relating to PB. The purpose of this literature review is to justify that this research adds value to the subject and to *'pay homage to those who have gone before me and whose work has influenced my thinking'* (Thody 2006).

This literature review will put into context the transformation of a bureaucratic public administration in the early to middle twentieth century into a citizen centred public service and the fundamental role that public participation now plays in prioritising public services. The review will further identify the increasing significance of PB as a mechanism for public participation and trace its origins to Brazil in the late 1980's and its adoption globally as a tool for devolving public sector decision making to the citizens.

2.2 Rationale to undertaking the research

There has been a significant transformation in the expectations of the citizen in relation to the public sector's obligations to the community it serves. Bovaird & Loffler (2003) suggest the following analysis. The historical notion of 'public administration' prevalent up until the 1980's was one of an uninspired bureaucracy with a civil service culture of 'nanny knows best'. 'Public Administration' evolved into 'Public Management' in the early 1980's with the introduction of a performance management culture underpinned by targets and a doctrine of 'best value'. The last decade has witnessed the public sector generally undergoing a metamorphosis from 'Public Management' to 'Public

Governance' where the performance management attention on results is still relevant but is superseded by the concentration on outcomes achieved by citizens and stakeholders sharing in the process in which decisions are reached.

Public Governance namely 'the way in which stakeholders interact with each other in order to influence the outcomes of policies' (Governance International, UK) is a highly significant concept in relation to this dissertation and the rationale for exploring the synergy between managing the expectations of the citizen and actually devolving fiscal decision making to the community. Indeed Bovaird & Loffler (2003) ask the question 'should the public sector role of fiscal policy making change to one of policy moderating'.

Indeed as a result of organisational transformation, more recent academics have coined the phrase 'New Public Management (Gruening, G. 2001) highlighting in studies on public governance the interesting trend for citizen inclusion in the governance process. Many public organizations are responding to the philosophy of New Public Management simply through wider disclosure to citizens, whilst others contend that with performance, transparency appears to be the key principle. The loss of legitimacy faced by public organizations in many countries pushes politicians to disclose more information in order to regain citizen confidence.

The rationale of this research project is based on the premise that the public have a choice about 'collective activity and purpose' as espoused by Ranson & Stewart (1989) by where they can enter into a dialogue and decide about the needs of the community.

It is in this context that citizen participation has become a key principle in the policies of central government, regional government (in relation to this study the WG) and local government (the vision and corporate aims of the local authority namely DCC).

2.3 Citizen participation in decision making

Osborne and Gaebler (1992) provide a picture of the bureaucratic model of local government in the early and mid- twentieth century based on Max Weber's machine-like efficiency, where hierarchy prevailed and only those at the top of the pyramid possessed enough information to make informed decisions. Fast forward to today's information society and knowledge based economy and in progressive democratic societies, demand is growing for tools and protocols that allow communities to work together strategically and demand from the public sector consultation, accountability, transparency and inclusiveness (Driver & Armstrong 2005).

The concept that citizens want to be heard and have the opportunity and ability to influence the community development process is not new: *"The essential feature of a common thought is not that it is held in common, but it has been produced in common"* (Mary Parker Follet 1868-1933).

As local government moves towards models of 'citizen-centred' government so have the expectations of the citizen in public participation. The consequence of mainstreaming public participation is the emerging philosophy that there is now a new expectation **of** the public to not just offer opinions but that the opinions should be informed and that the citizen should participate in decision making and be prepared to take responsibility for taking tough decisions – the ethos as it happens of participatory budgeting.

Public participation has many definitions but as it is set in a local government context we will use Graham and Phillips (1998) observation that public participation is:

'deliberate and active engagement of citizens by the council (or administration) – outside the electoral process – in making policy decisions or in setting strategic direction'.

The challenge for the public sector is ensuring that participation is more deliberate, focussed, innovative and inclusive by moving towards citizen engagement rather than merely participation.

In order to understand the mechanism of participatory budgeting we need to dissect and reflect upon the term 'public participation' and the historic context in which it has developed.

2.4 The role of 'public participation'

According to Sherry Arnstein's empirical work 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation' in 1969 'citizen participation is citizen power'. Arnstein's eight rungs on the ladder of citizen participation adroitly describe the levels of participation from the bottom rung of 'manipulation (non-participation) to the top rung of 'citizen control' (citizen power). Although based on Arnstein's research of American communities in the 1960's its explanation of power structures in society and how they interact is still relevant to the student of citizen participation as it still applies to any hierarchical society in terms of who has the power to make decisions. Arnstein pointed out how the legislative mandate for "maximum feasible participation" in urban development had frequently been ignored, or applied in ways that resulted in little or no genuine power for local communities.

Fig 1 : Arnstein's 'A ladder of participation'.

Source: Arnstein (1969)

Wilcox (1998) a fervent supporter of Arnstein's theories has five rungs of the same ladder and adds information, consultation, deciding together, acting together and finally supporting independent community activity.

There are some weaknesses however in Arnstein's much acclaimed research. In response to Arnstein's Ladder, Connor (1988) proposed a "New Ladder of Citizen Participation" intended to better reflect "a logical progression" from one level to another to "prevent and resolve public controversy about major issues" through information-feedback activities. If this did not lead to resolution, then consultation, joint planning, mediation or litigation could be employed in order to reach a resolution. Connor's ladder

is structured in accordance with a cumulative sequence of increasing levels of participation and incorporating the use of mediation and litigation, to reach the end of resolving or preventing a dispute over some public controversy.

Critics of Connor (Bruns 2003) contend that shifting to mediation or litigation does not, however, raise the level of participation by citizens and his ladder does not include delegation of authority or other shifts toward citizen control as an option.

While Arnstein's scale was deliberately designed to emphasize citizen empowerment, Connor's ladder focuses primarily on situations where one party, usually government, holds primary authority to decide and may have to engage or even negotiate with others, but would not hand over decision making power to them.

New thinking sees participation as a 'right', placing participation as the very foundation of democratic practice (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2000) and recognises the 'agency' of citizenship as 'makers and shapers rather than 'users and choosers' enabling citizens to act as 'agents' of the public sector (Lister 1998).

2.5 Barriers to public engagement

Although academics such as Arnstein (1969), Martin & Boaz (2000), Wilcox (1999), Lounds *et al* (2001) etc. all extol the virtues of public engagement it does have its detractors and many studies refer to the barriers and pitfalls of the engagement process. Delanty (2002) suggests it is difficult to distinguish between "empowerment for ethico-practice" and innovative mechanisms of social control. Hodgson (2004) refers to "manufactured civil society". Consequently, for Hodgson participation is merely a mechanism for extending state power through social actors and provide a means of controlling civil society. Similarly Muir (2004) sees the delivery of regeneration policies

through public engagement as an element of a state “hegemonic project” which provides an “arena for the management of social conflict”.

Goetz and Gaventa (2001) argue the importance of strengthening ‘voice’ at one end and strengthening ‘receptivity to voice’ on the part of government institutions at the other end. For the voice to be heard preconditions for ‘voice’ must be created through awareness raising and capacity building and ‘the possibility for engagement cannot be taken as a given, even if mechanisms are created’.

It is this ‘receptivity of voice’ which appears to be a weak link in the process of public engagement particularly at local government level where a building of capacity and support for local government representatives to be responsive and learn how to change their role to the new environment. As Gaventa (2004) succinctly makes the comment *‘For many decades, government staff and elected officials have been trained to act **for** the community. Changing to act **with** the community requires new attitudes and behaviours.’*

Howarth & Morrison (2003) identify key barriers for genuine local engagement in terms of increased workload, slow decision making process, participation targets etc. Coupled with the accusation levelled at central and local government that engagement and devolved decision making is off loading the larger social responsibilities there is justification in the often quoted *‘Dammed if you do, dammed if you don’t’*.

It is apparent from the above analysis that defining the concept of participation and its boundaries proves a contentious undertaking. Perhaps the final word should rest with Edelman (as cited by Bishop & Davis, 2002) *‘liberals, radicals and authoritarians all favour participation, a tribute to the term’s symbolic potency and semantic hollowness’*.

2.6 The role of participatory budgeting

The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) in conjunction with the Participatory Budgeting Unit (PBU) have developed the following definition of PB:

‘Participatory budgeting directly involves local people in making decisions on the spending and priorities for a defined public budget. This means engaging residents and community groups and representative of all parts of the community to discuss spending priorities, making spending proposals and vote on them, as well as giving local people a role in the scrutiny and monitoring of the process’. (‘Participatory Budgeting: a national strategy’ CLG 2008).

This is complemented by the Local Government Information Unit’s definition of PB as:

‘A process for bringing together local communities to the decision-making process around public budgets that makes new connections between residents, political representatives and local government official’ (Cox, 2006).

The PBU claims that participatory budgeting can improve the democratic process, widening participation and reinvigorating the role of local authorities, local councillors and civil society, and increasing trust in public institutions. Participatory budgeting, the PBU suggests, can make public spending more effective by improving:

- ❖ The way money is invested, reflecting what people want.
- ❖ How service provision is monitored.
- ❖ How local authorities acquire better knowledge about their people and areas.

In addition, according to the PBU, participatory budgeting can strengthen the community and voluntary sectors, focus on poorer communities, and build social capital by creating forums in which local groups can meet, negotiate and take decisions together. It can enhance community cohesion as people come together and feel part of a community. Citizens can gain a better understanding of the complexities of setting budgets and choosing between competing priorities—they can be more responsible by being more aware of the resource constraints on their wishes. They can be active citizens not passive customers or consumers.

Although successive British governments have not seen PB as the sole panacea for citizen engagement it has been identified as one mechanism to address a concern for the health of our democracy—notably a worry over low turnout at elections, with few people being involved in local politics and low levels of trust and confidence in central and local government (*Department for Communities and Local Government*).

This dissertation will analyse its origins and growth as a worldwide mechanism for devolving some fiscal decisions to the community and through literature research identify the key ingredients for its successful application and its dissenters both internationally and at a UK and sub-regional (Welsh) perspective.

2.7 The ‘Porto Alegre’ experiment.

It was said that Brazil in the middle to late part of the twentieth century was one of the most unjust societies in the world (World Bank, 1995). Indeed according to Santos (1998) it was a country characterised by a long tradition of authoritarian politics. It is remarkable therefore that PB as an embryo has its birth in Brazil and more specifically

in the city of Porto Alegre. The 'Porto Alegre' phenomenon will be explored and commented upon before concentrating on the evolution of PB in the UK and in particular at a sub-regional level in Denbighshire.

Porto Alegre is the largest city in the Brazilian state of 'Rio Grande do Sul' with a population of 1,440,939 (2006 est: Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics). Historically this city like all others in Brazil had a culture where the state had predominance over civil society and the political and social marginalisation of the 'popular' or 'working' class. In the late seventies, however Brazil moved towards a democratic transition with an emphasis on the rights of citizens and political decentralisation which culminated in a 1988 Constitution. It was against this national backdrop that innovative experiments in public participation developed, particularly at municipal government level with the traditional techno bureaucracy giving way (sometimes reluctantly) to techno democracy.

It is generally acknowledged that the most successful experiment was Porto Alegre's innovative urban experiment aimed at redistributing city resources in favour of the more vulnerable social groups by means of participatory democracy (Santos). The catalyst in Porto Alegre was the success in the municipal elections of January 1989 of the Workers Party or 'Partido dos Trabalhadores' and their introduction of 'popular administration' which guaranteed popular participation in the preparation and spending of the municipal budget. Priorities for government funding are established at the neighbourhood level through large-scale public forums. The neighbourhood assemblies also choose community representatives who take the neighbourhood priorities to a higher tier comprising of themselves and the elected representatives.

2.8 The growth of PB worldwide

The 'Porto Alegre' success story has successfully been replicated throughout the third world. In Indonesia 'forum wargas' or citizen forums have emerged where the local citizen meets with local officials to discuss issues and identify solutions. In the Philippines nongovernmental organisations sit at the same table with elected officials to draw up developments plans and the process is underpinned by legislation. Villagers in Uganda are involved through the participation process in agreeing local priorities for the national budget. (Gaventa, 2004). In Zambia where "all politics is local" there is now 'The National Decentralisation Policy towards Empowering the People (Sakala, 2008) and in Bombay in India there are over 150' chawl committees' working on local problems such as the water committee, the latrine committee, the drainage and garbage committee (Srinivas, 1994).

The unmistakable commonality between the above studies is that they are all third world countries with a 'democratic deficit' as cited by Sakala (2008). This is largely due to the disillusionment of their citizens with their national or local governments corruption, lack of responsiveness to the needs of the poor and disconnection from the lives of ordinary citizens.

Sintomer *et al* (2008) however are cautious that PB was invented in the developing nations in a specific context and that following its importation to Seville (Spain), Berlin (Germany) or Plock (Poland) '*can one still speak of one dynamic*' or is the name the only common link.

Although academics acknowledge that no one blueprint is suitable for all countries there are lessons that European countries can learn. Indeed it can be argued that Western democracies can learn from the poorer countries of the world and follow the paths of several developing countries who have enshrined in law the right of civic participation

as demonstrated by Bolivia's 'Law of Popular Participation' and Zambia's 'National Decentralisation Policy' (Gaventa, 2004; Sakala, 2008).

Having placed citizen participation, governance and PB in a historic and global context this Literature Review will now analyse its significance closer to home in terms of national strategies, its political relevance under the current governmental 'BIG Society' debate and its influence on sub-UK policies espoused by the WG and Denbighshire's corporate objectives.

2.9 Current thinking in relation to community empowerment

2.9.1 Central Government policies

Jones (2009) comments on the rhetoric expressed by successive governments, notably a worry over low turnout at elections, with few people being involved in local politics and low levels of trust and confidence in government, including local government. This concern for the health of our democracy has awakened a desire in the current government to devolve power and responsibility through various community initiatives under its Big Society banner, one being the support for PB.

The UK Government is now perhaps one of the keenest disciples of PB. First advocated by the Labour Government of 2008 when the then Rt. Hon Hazel Blears Secretary of State, CLG launched the 'Participatory Budgeting: Draft National Strategy' and commented: *"I am proud to be part of a Government making a reality of what the Prime Minister has called "a reinvention of the way we govern", a shift in power and influence away from Whitehall, towards the town hall and towards local people themselves"*.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/participatorybudgeting>

The main thrust of the strategy is on encouraging local authorities to devolve more decision making on budgets to the community and a commitment to working with other government departments on policies to devolve spending decisions for other service providers, such as police and health budgets. The driver for change is the ambition that PB will be used by all English local authorities by 2012.

The Conservative / Liberal Democrats Coalition has endorsed the previous Administration's philosophy on PB and aligned it to their flagship "Big Society" drive to empower communities. The Big Society is the Government's vision of a society where individuals and communities have more power and responsibility, and use it to create better neighbourhoods and local services. PB, it would appear, has already established its credentials sitting comfortably with the Coalition's Minister for Decentralisation, Greg Clark description of the three elements to creating the Big Society: *"The first is about what the state can do for us. The second is about what we can do for ourselves. And the third is about what we can do for others"*.

Many advocates believe that the current political and economic climate will ideally suit participatory mechanisms such as PB which are well placed to take advantage of this new political vigour and direction although some like Cockell (2011) are more guarded *'Big Society in a recession: misfortune or perfect timing'*.

Many local authorities appear to be taking the ethos of the Big Society at face value, recognising that it is potentially *'not a substitute for services at risk from cuts in public expenditure but about harnessing the positive will and energy of local people to lead and deliver on their community's aspirations'*. (Hooper 2011).

Delivery of the Big Society policy will be through the recently announced Decentralisation and Localism Bill currently going through the Parliamentary process.

The Bill identifies six key actions that have to be delivered:

Lift the burden of bureaucracy – by removing the cost and control of unnecessary red tape and regulation, whose effect is to restrict local action; and

Empower communities to do things their way – by creating rights for people to get involved with, and direct the development of, their communities.

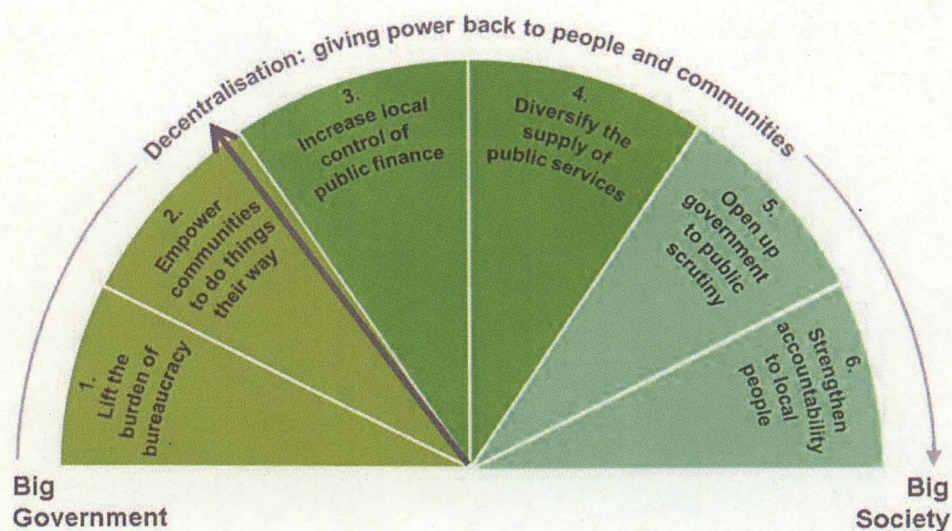
Increase local control of public finance – so that more of the decisions over how public money is spent and raised can be taken within communities;

Diversify the supply of public services – by ending public sector monopolies, ensuring a level playing field for all suppliers, giving people more choice and a better standard of service.

Open up government to public scrutiny – by releasing government information into the public domain, so that people can know how their money is spent, how it is used and to what effect;

Strengthen accountability to local people – by giving every citizen the power to change the services provided to them through participation, choice or the ballot box.

Fig 2: Guide to decentralisation.



Public sector information licenced
under the Open Government Licence
v1.0

Source: Department of Communities and Local Government

(<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/decentralisationguide>)

It can be claimed that within all six elements PB has a unique role to play. It is too early in the life of the Bill to evaluate its true significance, however for this Literature Review it is a key piece of future legislation which makes public engagement 'a right' rather than 'an ideal'.

It would appear that many English councils have, under the banner of the Big Society, adopted not only a PB approach with 'spare' pots of money but are taking a more radical approach of allocating mainstream budgets - '*connecting people with the process of designing local services*' (Wallace 2011).

2.9.2 Wales Government initiatives

The WG programme of citizenship was outlined in the Labour / Plaid Cymru Coalition's flagship document 'One Wales: a progressive agenda for Wales'. Like Central

Government it too recognises the role of the community in determining its own future *'Our vision is of a fair and just Wales, in which all citizens are empowered to determine their own lives and to shape the communities in which they live'*. This document follows the recommendations of Sir Jeremy Beecham's review of local service delivery – *'Delivering Beyond Boundaries: Citizen-centred local services for Wales'* published in November 2006 where public service organisations must be more ambitious about involving citizens and engaging them in the design, delivery and improvement of public services. Services must be designed to meet the needs of all citizens and there must be core principles and standards for customer service, and clear and transparent access to redress.

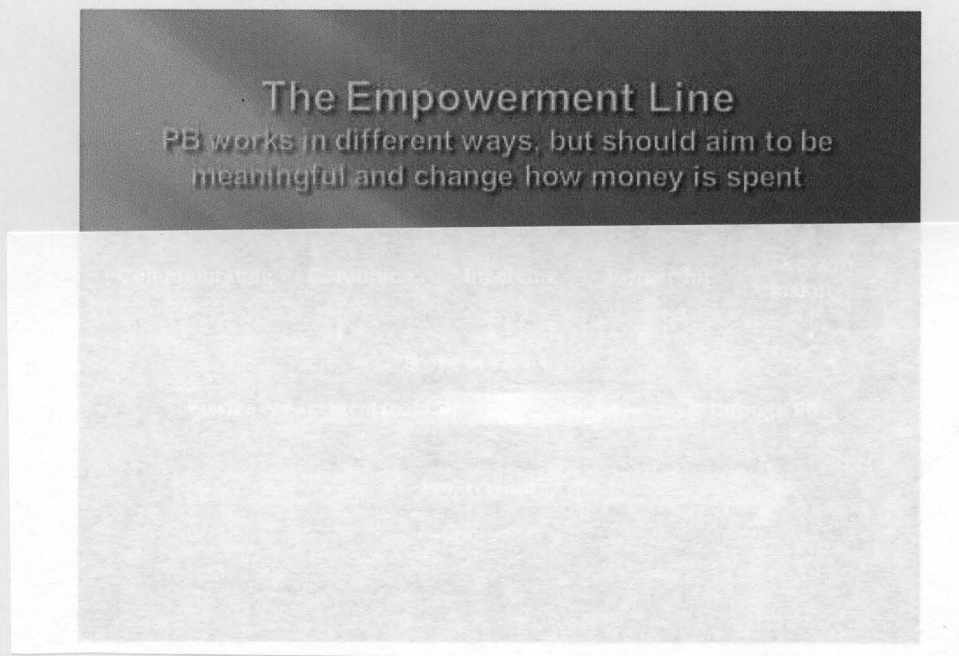
Despite the above platitudes however there is no current legislative support for PB within WG although many of the Assembly Members have a high regard for the process and have seen the effectiveness of devolution of public funds to community projects. Many advocates of PB in the Principality see the reluctance to impose PB as a duty upon the public sector (unlike the English model) as a distinct advantage fearing that such an imposition of PB policy would stifle its natural osmosis.

The WG has provided financial support to the Wales Participatory Budgeting Unit (WPBU) which is a stand-alone voluntary sector body tasked with promoting and facilitating PB within Wales. The WPBU has developed an impressive track record of delivering PB projects in partnership with public sector bodies and has acted as an ideal conduit between local government and the community it serves.

Key to the principles that govern the work of the WPBU is their belief that community empowerment is critical to the process of PB. Their philosophy is built around the fundamental principle of an 'empowerment line' which adopts Arnstein's' ladder of

participation' and transposes it into a PB concept. It describes the transition of communicating to consulting, to involving, to partnership working, to finally decision making and makes the distinction between the passive communication stage of merely 'communicating' to active PB through partnership and devolved decision making to the community.

Fig 3: 'The Empowerment Line': Wales Participatory Budgeting Unit



Source: www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/wales/docs

2.9.3 Denbighshire County Council's initiatives

Denbighshire's flagship vision of 'bringing the council closer to the people' has developed from a growing consensus that the way forward is to focus on both a more active and engaged citizenry and a more responsive and effective council that can deliver needed public services. This involves a fundamental change in the relationship

between council and its residents as the citizen moves from being the historic 'user or chooser' of public service policies decided by councillors and officers to 'makers and shapers' of policies themselves. Key to this process is the clarification that participation means more than consultation; it involves shared responsibilities for decision making in establishing policies and allocating resources. The catalyst to this emerging council philosophy is the active and participating citizen rather than the notion of citizen as merely a consumer.

To underpin the above strategy the council has defined how it can deliver this vision by defining Denbighshire as *"a place where residents are recognised as the experts in their own lives, shaping their neighbourhoods and engaged in the design, delivery and evaluation of public services"*.

2.10 Barriers to Participatory Budgeting and its detractors

Although disciples of the process are unequivocal in their enthusiasm and commitment to PB in relation to pro-poor policies (Brautigam 2004) and the export of the Brazilian model to a world stage (Allahwala & Keil 2005) there are those who acknowledge that there are challenges and have some misgivings about its versatility (Sintomer *et al*, 2008) and some argue it has limitations and is no '*magic bullet*' ((Shah, 2007).

Furthermore tensions can arise between the '*national agenda*' and the local '*leadership role*' of local authorities (Rocke, 2008) which may become more apparent as the current Government instigates its vision of the Big Society.

The role of central government in driving forward such initiatives does have its detractors, as epitomized by the New Economics Foundation (2010) "*People who have least will benefit least from the transfer of power and responsibility, while those with*

higher stocks of social and economic resources will be better placed to seize the new opportunities. The Big Society idea is strong on empowerment and weak on equality.”

Some commentators have a more pragmatic approach *‘In the end, government cannot build the Big Society. It can prepare the ground and then get out of the way’* (Cockell, 2011).

Many detractors of PB namely Howarth and Morrison et al (2003); Lawrence and Deagan (2001)) and in particular Brodie et al (2009) all question whether the participants of PB are those who ‘shout the loudest’ and are generally sufficiently adroit and articulate. Furthermore they tend to be demographically white, older, better educated and middle-class. These academics also have reservations that PB fails to meet the raised expectations of residents, overburdens citizens, challenges the position of elected members, exacerbates community divisions and is long term unsustainable.

2.11 Literature Gap

Although there is a significant depth of research undertaken on the subject of PB in academic journals both nationally and internationally, there is a dearth of material in books - although hardly surprising due to its relative infancy. The material available, however, does somewhat lack quantitative and qualitative analysis. There also appears to be an imbalance in terms of the relatively few detractors of the process to enable an independent assessment of its strengths and weaknesses – and in particular when the process of PB is appropriate and when it is not. For example the Porto Alegre blueprint is repeatedly cited in references not only as the cradle of PB but still the model to replicate. However, the few academics who have specifically studied the Brazilian model do identify its limitations e.g. participants in PB tend to be interested in short to medium term public works (Wampler 2007), the dichotomy of scarce resources versus

raised expectations where it was impossible to meet adequately the demands of the communities and the tensions that surface when a system of power sharing between community representatives and the executive (Santos, 1998).

Furthermore there appears to be a lack of academic study into PB projects which have failed and explanations given for such failures. This Literature Review identifies the overwhelming support for PB and whilst the academic studies quoted do give a sense of balance in terms of weaknesses identified it is invariably against a backdrop of enthusiastic approval for the concept.

The CLG's phased 'National Evaluation of PB in England' (2010) acknowledges that its initial trawl of PB projects has failed to derive a consistent set of output indicators and quantify outputs and outcomes although it applauds the ethos behind the projects delivered.

As PB is a relatively new concept in Wales, and indeed Denbighshire appears to be at the vanguard of its application as a tool for citizen engagement, there is little evaluation within the Principality. It is therefore prudent and timely that this research document can add knowledge and case study analysis to the subject matter and contribute to the debate of PB and other civic participatory tools being mainstreamed into the core fabric of public sector fiscal policy.

2.12 Summary of Chapter Two

This Chapter explores the concept of citizen participation and PB as a mechanism for empowering communities. A number of empirical studies are described outlining the various theories and levels of public participation and barriers to the concept before moving on to describe the origins and significance of PB and its detractors

This chapter concludes with the current position of PB in the United Kingdom, its relevance 'vis-à-vis' current Government thinking in relation to the Big Society and the micro development of PB in Wales and at a local government level.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction to Chapter Three

This chapter outlines the methodology used in the dissertation and justifies the approach taken with an analysis of the research methods employed. In detailing the preferred empirical approach it also seeks to explain which research methods were considered inappropriate. This chapter introduces the case study approach and the adoption of a questionnaire to capture and evaluate potential opposing views on the subject matter. Finally the chapter outlines the ethical considerations that have underpinned the research and evaluation.

3.2 Research philosophy and principles

Rudestam & Newton (2007) in evaluating various methods of inquiry conclude *'The key to evaluating a completed study is whether or not the selected method is sufficiently rigorous and appropriate to the research question and whether or not the study is conceptually and theoretically grounded'*.

The researcher has explored the myriad of methodologies, some more appropriate than others and has been guided by Cameron's (2008) definition of methodology as *'theory of how research should be undertaken and includes the theoretical and philosophical assumptions on which research is based'*.

As stated in Chapter One I have chosen *'qualitative'* rather than *'quantitative'* approach due to the nature of the subject. Furthermore, using well documented distinctions between *'quantitative'* and *'qualitative'* research (Rudestam & Newton, 2007; Mauch & Park, 2003) it is apparent that the quantitative approach of manipulating and controlling the conditions of the study in order to limit the number

of variables, standardising procedures and measures, and a reliance on statistical analysis is inappropriate. The very nature of PB necessitates the researcher taking a holistic approach – requiring an engagement with groups and events and observing the process without imposing a prescribed specification of variables and hypothesis.

As the dissertation will rely heavily on the social science a 'positivism' framework is too prescriptive with its 'law like generalisations' (Saunders *et al*, 2009). Far more appropriate is an 'interpretivism' approach as the concept of PB is rooted in interpreting social roles. The metaphor of 'social actors' and reference to '*life as a theatre where humans play a part on the stage of human life*' as described by Saunders *et al* (2009) fits perfectly the '*raison d'être*' of the public participatory aspect of the research methodology. Indeed the exploration of the phenomenon of PB cannot be undertaken without a researcher immersing themselves in phenomenology and making sense of the subject matter in a social context.

If we analyse the dissertation in terms of Burrell and Morgan's (1982) sociological paradigms the work may initially sit within the 'functionalist paradigm' offering rational explanation of the development of PB and underpinned by recommendations based on its future as a consultative tool within a local government environment. However, a more comfortable paradigm is likely to be Burrell and Morgan's (1982) 'interpretive paradigm' allowing the researcher to take into account organisational politics and the way in which power can be used or manipulated.

Inevitably I will be adopting a practitioner-researcher role, maximising my knowledge of the organisation and subject matter. However in order to enrich the research and ensure that familiarity does not breed '*assumptions and preconceptions that you*

carry with you' (Saunders *et al.* 2009) I will undertake comparative research outside my immediate organisation by observing a PB event as an observer.

The tools of research that will be adopted will include a questionnaire and semi structured interviews with practitioners and participants of participatory budgeting underpinned by observational research of a PB community event. The whole procedure will be through an 'inductive' rather than 'deductive' methodology with a 'action research' approach in order that the results can hopefully inform and promote change within the organisation.

The case study has perhaps unintentionally introduced an unexpected research tool namely 'action research'. Saunders *et al* (2009) define action research as 'research strategy concerned with the management of a change and involving close collaboration between practitioners and researchers. The results flowing from action research should also inform other contexts'

The observational research and subsequent analysis is suited to the introduction and partial adoption of an 'action research' paradigm as it naturally replicates the four key themes of 'action research' as identified by Saunders *et al* namely:

- ❖ The observation of the PB within a community setting mirrors Saunders *et al* emphasis on 'research in action rather than research about action'.
- ❖ Action research revolves around the resolution of an issue (the identification and feasibility of projects) by those who experience the issues directly (the PB participants). The involvement of practitioners in the research is both a principle of PB and action research.

- ❖ The analysis of the PB event requires the researcher's personal observations that result from their presence, participation or even intervention in the process being examined. Gummesson (2000) places participant *observation* at the core of anthropology but distinguishes participation with *active intervention* as action research.
- ❖ The PB event encompasses a third principle of action research namely diagnosing, planning, taking action and evaluating.
- ❖ The rationale behind action research suggests there are implications beyond the specific project and that the results can inform and influence other situations.

This dissertation will consist of two distinct quantitative pieces of research namely:

- ❖ the observation and understanding of the PB process within a closely defined geographic area using the allocation of a pre-determined budget and how the community engage with the process and an evaluation of that process
- ❖ through a questionnaire, make an analytical assessment of the political and senior management support for the devolution of some mainstream budgets to the community to spend using PB as a key mechanism and its integration within the corporate strategy of the council.

The above approaches to the study will be underpinned by informal discussions with key agencies involved nationally with delivering PB in Welsh communities.

3.3 Justification for the use of a case study

The use of case study for research purposes in PB is particularly suited as it explores an empirical investigation of '*a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context*' Robson (2002) as quoted by Saunders *et al.*

Yin (2003) distinguishes between three types of case study research: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory and Gummesson (2000) identifies further traits of case research: to generate theory and as a means of initiating change. Rather than use these traits in isolation the research paper will involve an amalgam of all five traits to aid understanding, formulate theories and identify recommendations.

Yin (2003) further identifies between four case study strategies based on a premise of single case *verses* multiple case and holistic case *verses* embedded case. For the purpose of this research a single case is being adopted as it is likely to be typical of the PB process and provides the researcher with the opportunity to observe and analyse in detail. Although multiple cases focuses upon the need to establish whether the findings of the first case is replicated and according to Yin the preferable option, the time limitations of this research make use of multiple case studies unrealistic in terms of the PB cycle taking several months to complete.

Yin's second dimension of using a 'holistic case study' *verses* an 'embedded case' is also dictated to by time constraints and the ability to observe PB events as and when they arise. The opportunity to explore the mechanism of one particular PB event as a 'pilot study' has led the researcher to adopt an 'embedded case' approach of concentrating on one particular activity.

The researcher is conscious that the application of a case study as a piece of empirical work does have its academic detractors who criticise the method on the basis of lacking statistical reliability and validity and furthermore can lead to generating hypotheses and generalisations.

Justification for including one case study as part of the research method rests in the premise that it will assist in reaching a '*fundamental understanding of the structure, process and driving forces*' as espoused by Normann and quoted by Gummesson (2000). Indeed one of the cornerstones of Glaser and Strauss's 'Grounded Theory' approach again quoted by Gummesson is that theories and models should be grounded in real world observations rather than be governed by established theory.

The validity of any case study requires the researcher to continually assess any assumption made, revise results, retest any theory and reappraise the given limitations that have been set for the study and Chapter Four will address this prerequisite.

The researcher will adopt an unstructured observation approach to the case study with a low degree of structure – essentially attending different meetings as an observer and recording the events and conversations that take place in a research diary. The advantage of this methodology is twofold and is influenced by Fisher's (2010) test of when to use an open or pre-structured method.

- ❖ If you don't know what kind of answers you will get from respondents or sources, then you should use an open approach

and

- ❖ If you are looking for new ideas, then adopt an open approach.

The case study will be less theorising and more descriptive in order to add greatly to the 'stock of understanding' (Fisher) and will identify issues, tensions and contradictions between PB participants and / or practitioners.

3.4 Justification for the use of a questionnaire

All PB events co-ordinated under the auspices of the WPBU adopt a self-evaluation toolkit which encompass satisfaction questionnaires for participants and evaluation questionnaires for stakeholders. The Cae Howell Project has adopted these principles and at every stage of the PB process participants, stakeholders and the funded project sponsors have all had their views recorded. These views are collated by the WPBU and form a comprehensive report on each individual PB event with recommendations and learning experiences. The research undertaken for this dissertation does not therefore intend to replicate a piece of work currently being undertaken by another organisation and which will have been undertaken by all PB projects namely assimilating the views of participants.

Further justification for not eliciting the views of PB voting participants at the PB event in Denbighshire is the extensive research already undertaken in this field. Informal discussions with the Programme Manager for the WPBU confirm the existence of recent academic research undertaken by the Institute of Social Studies of Andalucía – a EU wide study on the impact of PB on local democracy and a recent study undertaken by the University of Glamorgan into attitudes and perceptions of PB, both of which will be published and in the public domain later in 2011.

A key objective of this research project is 'to understand, analyse and critically examine the current approach to PB in local government and in particular DCC' as

identified in Chapter One. The Literature Review in Chapter Two chronicles the success of PB on the world-wide stage and identifies its many supporters and detractors; however there is little analysis of the political or corporate will to mainstream PB and adopt the approach across all council services. Whilst the Literature Review acknowledges academic support such as Graham and Phillips (1998) for the *notion* of engaging the community in policy decisions what is not clearly assessed is the pragmatism of adopting PB within current financial constraints with the notable exception of scholars such as Howarth & Morrison (2003) who identify key barriers.

Whilst the Literature Review describes the national context it is the local context that requires exploration to understand and rationalise the current thinking within Denbighshire with a view to inform the future strategic direction the council is likely to take.

A questionnaire was devised to elicit the views and aspirations of practitioners and observers of the process from a public sector perspective. A questionnaire was sent out to a number of pre-selected county councillors and council officers who have had experience of PB directly as participants, sponsors or facilitators or indirectly as interested observers. The purpose of targeting specifically those who have experienced the process is to ascertain their views as to its place within a local authority setting and to seek views on its democratic qualities and sustainability. Only those councillors and officers who had experience of the process were canvassed for their views as it was the experience of a PB activity that was key to the study and not their 'perception' of an activity they had not participated in.

In particular the researcher was interested in councillors' views on the devolution of public funds to the community and how this complemented their democratic role and responsibilities. The views of officers who had experience of PB was also important to gain an insight into the operational demands placed upon a PB event and explore their subjective views on its place as an engagement tool.

The questionnaire was also sent out to all members of the council's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) for their views on its strategic place as a community tool for devolving local and core budgets. The study will seek to explore any dichotomy that exists between those who have experienced PB and perhaps senior management who may be unfamiliar with the concept but will be key in deciding if PB should be endorsed corporately. The SLT's views were also canvassed in order to evaluate current thinking at a corporate level.

The questionnaire was self – administered via e-mail with the option for respondents to have a telephone questionnaire as an alternative to completing and returning the questionnaire via e-mail. The questionnaire was accompanied by a covering e-mail explaining why the information is required, how the information will be used and reassuring the respondent as to their anonymity. As many of the respondents are bilingual the accompanying e-mail greeted and thanked the responder in Welsh and English (See Appendix i).

Devising a pre-coded questionnaire was discarded as the researcher wished to delve into the respondent's views and perspective using an exploratory technique rather than adopt a rigid tick box style response. In this research the 'open' questionnaire was the favoured technique for data collection giving the respondent the opportunity to become engaged with the question seeking their attitudes and

opinions and afford the researcher the opportunity to explore variability in different phenomena' (Saunders *et al*).

In designing the questionnaire consideration was given to Saunders *et al* differing types of data variable namely opinion; behaviour; or attribute. For the purpose of this research the data variables of opinion and attribute will be explored.

Although the respondents to the questionnaire remain anonymous the research does categorise each response according to the position of the individual within the council i.e. councillor, member of the SLT or officers supporting the PB process.

Using the above methodology the researcher will be adopting Brown's (2008) three strands of approach to methodology of what is real or ontology (the case study), knowledge or epistemology (the views of councillors and officers) and values or axiology (the observations and perceptions of the SLT).

A questionnaire approach was considered to be an effective and efficient conduit for eliciting information and the alternative option for a telephone interview with the researcher was taken up by two respondents.

3.5 Research methods rejected

Other research methods were explored but ultimately discounted primarily due to:

- ❖ A deductive and quantitative approach was discarded due to the relatively small sample size chosen. Potential respondents were chosen for their knowledge and experience of the PB process and / or their strategic position within the council. The small sample size also reflects the relatively new concept of PB within the organisation.

- ❖ Arranging one to one interviews with councillors and the SLT was unrealistic due to constraints on their time and their geographic distribution throughout the county.
- ❖ As the researcher is an officer of the council with responsibility for shaping the corporate approach to PB, it was felt respondents might be less candid about their experiences of the subject matter if a face to face interview was conducted.

3.6 The application of an ethical approach

Brown (2006) defines ethics as *'norms or standards of behaviour that guide moral choices about our behaviour and our relationship with others. The goal of ethics in research is to ensure that no one is harmed or suffers adverse consequences from research activities'*.

Integrity in research is paramount and the researcher has deliberately protected the rights of individuals by non-attributing any comment or view directly to an identifiable person. Throughout this piece of research the ethical treatment of participants has underpinned the design of the questionnaire and assurances given in order to ensure no individual or organisation suffers physical harm, discomfort, pain, embarrassment or loss of privacy. The e-mail to participants in the questionnaire explain the study benefits to DCC and its partner organisations, explain the participant's rights and protections. The researcher assumes that if the person returns the questionnaire, they have consented to participate in the research.

The researcher's attendance at the Cae Howell event has been explained by the Chair of both the public meetings and working groups in terms of the role of the

researcher in 'fact finding' and gathering information about the PB process to inform DCC about PB and its potential replication elsewhere.

Although the researcher has responsibility for developing the principle of PB it is vital to alley any potential conflict of interest in undertaking such research The object of this research is to objectively and with transparency inform the process of whether to adopt as a strategic tool for engagement a PB process.

Saunders *et al* define observation as the '*observation, recording, description, analysis and interpretation of people's behaviour*' and it is this structure the researcher has adopted in the case study.

The researcher dismissed the need to become the 'complete participant' or 'complete observer', traits promoted by Gill and Johnson (2002) as a potential role. To have done so would have compromised the ethical stance adopted and there was no advantage in concealing the purpose of the observation. The 'participant as observer' trait was primarily adopted particularly in the public community meetings, however whilst observing both the Planning Group and Steering Group the researcher was asked to contribute to discussion in an advisory capacity.

The researcher adopted the practice of conducting primary observation, making notes of each meeting attended, however this is heavily underpinned by an experiential approach as perceptions and personal impressions are formed. The notes taken and impressions formed use two techniques highlighted by Robson (2002) namely a 'descriptive and narrative account'. The descriptive account of the stages observed detail the sequence of events and emerging decisions through discussion and compromise. The narrative account attempts to delve deeper into the

psychology and inter-personal interaction of the participants, particularly the members of the Steering Group who shape the process.

3.7 Summary of Chapter Three

This Chapter describes the methodology used in the research and introduces the research design, namely a case study approach and a questionnaire underpinned by informal discussions with national practitioners of PB.

This Chapter further justifies the research methods used and explains why other approaches were discarded. It concludes with an explanation of the ethical considerations adopted.

Chapter 4 Research process – the case study and questionnaire

4.1 Introduction to Chapter Four

The previous chapter explained the methodology and approach that will be taken in undertaking the research. This chapter describes the Denbighshire case study namely 'the Cae Howell - You Decide – Project' using the guiding principles of PB and the rationale behind a questionnaire targeted at PB practitioners and the political and corporate decision makers within various levels of local government.

4.2 The Cae Howell 'You Decide' Project.

This case study is an opportunity to observe and evaluate the PB process in action within the County of Denbighshire using observation and analytical techniques. The Cae Howell scheme and its various stages is observed and documented from initial discussions as to the appropriateness of using PB, through public meetings, establishment of working groups, through to the community voting evening and an evaluation of the whole process.

The choice of this particular PB event was self-selecting as it was the only event programmed to take place within the research period and was specifically prescribed to meet the needs of a geographic area within the county. The researcher used a qualitative approach where possible using observational techniques, particularly in the public meetings. Attendance at the Working Groups was also as an observer; however, at times the researcher had to interact with the process which inadvertently introduced a measure of 'action research' to the research philosophy.

The case study was observed over a period of seven months from inception to the PB voting event and formal evaluation by participants.

The town of Denbigh has three wards and the Upper Denbigh Ward has a population of 3,100 with the third highest unemployment rate in the County (4.5%). The ward has a high proportion of low income families and relatively high instances of anti-social behaviour in comparison with neighbouring wards. A large housing estate surrounds a public open space known as 'Cae Howell' which is maintained by the county council and has a variety of playing equipment for young children.

DCC's Leisure Services had identified a budget to invest in new play equipment at Cae Howell and in particular to:

- ❖ Provide equipment specifically for the older children who were currently taking over play equipment designed for younger children, depriving them of its use.
- ❖ Provide an area for social gathering / activities and assist in combating anti-social behaviour in the area by bored teenagers.

The local County Councillor had observed a successful similar PB project in a neighbouring town managed through a partnership approach between Leisure Services and the WPBU and thought a PB exercise would be ideally suited to deliver the outcomes at Cae Howell.







Key stakeholders were identified who could both potentially financially contribute to the project and actively engage with the local community in building capacity and participation.

The researcher attended all key meetings during the process from the first meeting with stakeholders to the final review meeting. The researcher was introduced at

these meetings as an officer from the county council who was researching PB with a view to extending it to other locations within the county.

This study will explain the various stages involved in the PB event, the participants and decisions made as the process evolved.

Table 1: Stages of the Cae Howell PB project

Stage 1	exploratory discussion between DCC and the Wales PB Unit
	
Stage 2	establishment of a stakeholder / partner 'planning group' and subsequent meetings
	
Stage 3	an open public meeting to explain the PB process and promote interest
	
Stage 4	establishment of a residents / facilitator 'steering group' and subsequent meetings
	
Stage 5	public PB voting event
	
Stage 6	delivering the schemes
	
Stage 7	review and monitoring meeting

Below is an explanation of each stage, who was involved, its remit and outcomes.

Stage 1 Initial discussion to explore the option of a PB scheme

As lead sponsor of the project, Leisure Services held initial explorative meetings with the Programme Manager of the WPBU to discuss the proposal, suggest its parameters and ensure it met the underlying principles of PB. **February 2011.**

Stage 2 Planning Group

The Planning Group consists of key stakeholders who will drive the process forward. Membership of this group is brought together by officers of DCC and consists of potential sponsors and public and voluntary sector bodies who deliver projects and services in Upper Denbigh. It is this group that dictates the funding available and sets the parameters of what needs to be achieved by whom and at what stage.

The initial budget from Leisure Services was £10k from its Play Capital Fund. Potential fiscal partners were identified from the public and private sector and the final amount made available to the Cae Howell PB event was over £20k. This amount is for the cost of play equipment and does not include officer and volunteer time, administration or publicity costs which have been found from other budgets.

The Planning Group were the decision makers in relation to progressing the event and ensured the process met the tight time schedules either by formally meeting or through virtual contact via e-mail. **February – March 2011.**

Stage 3 The public meeting to launch the Cae Howell 'Have your say' event

This meeting was extensively promoted through leaflets placed through every letterbox in the designated neighbourhood. Approximately 15 residents attended and the ages ranged from young children to grandparents. The rationale behind the meeting was explained by Leisure Services officers and the process of PB was explained by the WPBU. Nominations to form a Steering Group were made and the local press covered the event. **March 2011.**

Stage 4 The Steering Group

This group chaired by the local County Councillor had a mixture of residents (including children and young people) and facilitators from the WPBU and technical officers from DCC. The work of this group was to encourage the submission of projects and their evaluation in meeting the criteria set by the funding agencies. This group met on several occasions to deliberate and measure each project, seeking guidance from officers in terms of any required permissions and direction from the WPBU in adhering to the principles of PB. Usual attendance was 15 comprising of approximately 10 residents and five facilitators / advisors.

Seven projects were submitted with a total value of £60k. The group discounted two projects due to their excessive cost. **March – April 2011.**

Stage 5 Visit to the local primary school

This event was not pre-planned and was the result of a suggestion by a resident member of the Working Group. Representatives from the Steering Group with a facilitator from the WPBU visited the school and all the children (85 in total) gave their views on the projects submitted by the community groups. The researcher did not attend this visit. **May 2011.**

Stage 6 The Community Voting Event

This was attended by over 50 residents of all ages with light refreshments provided and only residents within the defined area of Denbigh were eligible to vote. Each project gave a three minute presentation followed by a vote using voting slips. The results along with the voting at the primary school were calculated using an electronic scoreboard. The projects ranged from a cableway, a roundabout for those with disabilities to a climbing wall. All participants were asked to complete an evaluation form and the next stage of the process – the installation and timetable for the work was explained. (See Appendix ii for a press cutting describing the event).

May 2011.

Stage 7 Delivery of agreed schemes

Once the schemes had been agreed at the Voting Event and locations decided, officers of the council placed orders for the new play equipment and liaised with contractors and suppliers. **May – September 2011.**

Stage 8 The evaluation meeting

This meeting was held to review the event and all its stages. Facilitated by the Community Development Officer each stage was assessed using a SWOT analysis. This meeting was attended by five individuals and the flipcharts used will form part of a report produced by the WPBU on the event. **July 2011.**

4.3 Cost of staging a PB event

Although the WPBU do not currently charge for their services and the staff time, from the various public bodies has not been charged to the project, there are

administrative costs associated with all PB events. WPBU suggest the average cost of each PB event being £4250. Leisure Services have spent £4750 on the Cae Howell event consisting of promotional material (flyers etc.), hire of venues, translation services etc. This amount has been found from Leisure Services Play Budget and has not been funded from the £10k allocated for Cae Howell play equipment.

4.4 A practitioner and participant questionnaire

A questionnaire was devised to elicit the views and aspirations of practitioners and observers of the process from a public sector perspective. The questionnaire was sent out to those county councillors or town and community councillors and officers of the county who had had experience of PB either as participants, facilitators, sponsors or as interested observers. The same questionnaire was sent to all of the council's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) for their views on its adoption as a corporate tool for community engagement and its development as a mechanism for distributing core budgets.

The focus of the research questions concentrates on the perception and experiences of local government officers and elected members rather than the community participants. Analysis of the community's participation have been well documented both internationally reference the work of Gaventa, J. (2004), The World Bank (1995), Goetz, A.M. and Gaventa, J. (2001), Graham, K.A. and Phillips, S.D (1998), de Sousa Santos, B (1998) and nationally by amongst others Cox, E.(2006), Muir, J. (2004).

This research took the pragmatist approach that little new evidence or insight would be achieved by chronicling the views of the community at the event, who all

appeared to be enthused by the event. Lacking in published academic research however is the view of decision makers and in particular the political dichotomy of devolving fiscal decisions to an unelected body, even if that body is the community at large. The questionnaire was deliberately directed to future decision makers who will be sitting in judgement as to the corporate direction PB would take as a mainstreamed tool for community engagement and if this ethos of devolved budgets sits comfortably within the political agenda of 'getting closer to the community'.

Although the respondents to the questionnaire remain anonymous the research does categorise each response according to the position of the individual within the various public sector bodies i.e. councillor, senior managers, officers supporting the PB process etc.

In order to give the study some context in relation to the national trends towards PB and the 'local model' used in Denbighshire the researcher had informal discussions with the Programme Manager for the WPBU.

4.5 Summary of Chapter Four

This chapter explains the research process undertaken through the exploration of a PB event and a series of questions posed to key decision makers in the council. The findings of both case study and questionnaire will be the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 5 Presentation of findings

5.1 Introduction to Chapter Five

This chapter seeks to present the collected data of both the questionnaire and case study introduced in Chapter Four. The evaluation of these findings and any conclusions drawn from the data presented will be discussed in the next chapter, Chapter Six.

5.2 Findings of the case study

The researcher attended each of the key stages of the Cae Howell PB project over a period of six months.

The role of the Planning Group. The key group who initiate and drive forward the various stages and bring specialist knowledge to the table i.e. the local Community Development Officer who was instrumental in leading on the door to door distribution of leaflets and identifying key residents who would become involved in the Steering Group.

There did however appear to be key agencies uninvolved in the process particularly youth workers and representatives of youth movements in the town. Although the Town Council was represented the local Town Councillors for that particular Ward did not appear to be engaged at any stage. Similarly with the exception of one local solicitors company, the business community were apathetic in making a financial contribution, but this was perhaps dependant on the amount of canvassing for donations and the current economic climate. There appeared also to be little buy-in from the local schools.

The role of the Steering Group. Consisting of key representatives from Leisure Services and the WPBU and local residents its role was to encourage the submission of projects and ensure they met the set criteria. The residents on the Group all had their preferred 'pet' projects and one or two became disengaged from the process when their schemes were discarded due to cost. The Steering Group did agree to amalgamate some similar projects which ensured significant savings and met the needs of different age groups. There was however a low attendance at the meetings by local residents perhaps reflecting general apathy and disengagement from this particular housing estate. A suggestion by a local resident resulted in representatives visiting a local primary school who with the children voting for their preferred project.

The public meetings. Attendance at the first meeting to explain how the community could have a say in choosing play equipment was disappointing with less than fifteen residents present (although some of these were children which was promising). On reflection the Planning Group would have chosen a venue closer to the housing estate, however with a leaflet drop to every property (over 200) having a venue capable of accommodating a potentially large audience was a priority.

The voting event attracted just over fifty residents and the presentations by the children on their scheme and the voting process was both professional and well organised. Five projects were submitted with a total cost of £46k vying for part of the allocated budget of £20k. The residents voted for their favourite project and these were added to the school votes. Following the vote two successful projects at a cost of over £18k were announced, however in an unusual twist, representatives of a local charitable trust were in the meeting and decided to fund one of the

unsuccessful projects in its entirety (cost of £8k) as it was for children with disabilities which met their charitable criteria.

Evaluation meeting. Attendance was disappointing with only one resident attending, however this meeting was a useful exercise in going through a SWOT analysis of each stage in the process. Indeed Officers and the WPBU gained valuable experience from this evaluation and will be better prepared in repeating the exercise elsewhere.

In measuring outcomes there are two key features of the 'Cae Howell' event the delivery of new play equipment chosen democratically by the children and parents; and through the PB process a significant increase of a budget for the purchase of equipment from the initial £10k allocation to a final budget of £26,423k.

Perhaps the success of the event from a community perspective was best demonstrated by a quote given to the researcher by a nine year old proposer of a scheme: *'I was scared going up to tell everyone about the pendulum swing but I practised first in the school and our project won'*.

There were, however, flaws in the Cae Howell process. The aim of the event was to provide equipment for the older children / young people but this seems to have been forgotten eg the local *primary* school voted on the submitted schemes but not the secondary school. The Literature Review in Chapter Two identifies those who are disparaging of the process (Jones and others) as it raises expectations – this was true to a degree in the case study as community groups at Cae Howell had no idea how much play equipment cost and suggested schemes totally beyond the agreed budget. Furthermore, due perhaps to time constraints there was no capacity building

for the community – a necessity for an area traditionally unused to engaging with the council.

5.3 Findings of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was directed specifically to councillors who were known to have had experience of PB in their town or village regardless of whether this experience was a positive or negative one.

The same questionnaire canvassed the views of Denbighshire’s SLT in order to evaluate current thinking at a corporate level. Similarly officers who have had specific experience of facilitating the PB process were also selected to gain an insight into the operational demands placed upon a PB project and explore their subjective views on its place as an engagement tool.

The questionnaire was sent to a total of 40 individuals who have had a varying degree of involvement in the PB process. The number of questionnaires returned was 22 giving a response rate of 55%.

Table 2: Breakdown of responders into categories

Responder	No of questionnaires sent	No of questionnaires returned	Response rate %
Councillors	23	11 *	47%
Denbighshire Officers	5	3	60%
Senior Leadership Team	12	8	66%

* In addition to the 11 councillors who returned the questionnaire, 3 other councillors responded declining the invitation due to having no experience of the PB process.

The respondents were asked to answer 6 questions, all seeking to elicit their views and experiences of PB and its place within DCC as an organisation promoting community choice and engagement.

The following questions were asked and analysed in terms of the three categories:

Table 3: Questions asked and collated responses

Question 1: For the following questions to be analysed in terms of your role in the PB process were you a voting participant, observer, support staff or have you had no involvement in a PB event?

Councillors: *Of the 11 questionnaires returned by councillors, all had direct experience of the PB process by being involved in the voting events either as voting participants or support staff.*

Denbighshire Officers: Of the 5 officers canvassed for their opinion 3 responded. All three responders are actively involved in facilitating PB events and are practitioners rather than participants.

Senior Leadership Team (SLT): The SLT consists of the Chief Executive, 3 Corporate Directors and 8 Heads of Service. Of the 8 responses in total only 2 have direct experience of a PB event, one as project sponsor / chair and one as support staff.

Question 2: What is your view of defined public funds being devolved to the community to spend rather than by elected councillors or officers?

Councillors: *All councillors were supportive of the devolution of some funds to the community to decide how it is spent. Most referred to the beneficial aspect of 'empowering' and 'involving' the community. In particular elected members were of the view PB suited small, well defined projects but had a more cautious approach to larger complex schemes.*

Denbighshire Officers: The officers gave a positive endorsement of PB as a tool to engage with the public and promote ownership of the outcome. Officers identified a 'tangible sense of influence in how money is spent at a local level' but were specific that a 'defined budget' is the key.

SLT: All eight responses saw a positive role for PB as one of many tools to be used to achieve the councils vision for 'getting closer to the community. There were, however several issues that made their approach a cautious one. Majority raised the concern that devolving funds to community groups to spend, without financial accountability was anathema to the democratic ethos of both local government officers and elected members. Some concern was also raised in respect of

'confusing "LOUD" with "GENUINE" voices'. Several responders were of the view that priorities should first be determined by elected members and that devolved sums to the community assist in delivering those priorities.

Question 3: Was your experience of a PB event a negative or positive one and why?

Councillors: All of the councillors had a very positive experience of the PB process that had taken place in their community. Some however, were mindful that the make-up of communities can vary significantly and that success does depend on the active participation and endorsement of the community as a whole to ensure the process is not 'high jacked' by small minority groups. Although convinced of the virtue of PB, several councillors had a view on their frequency commenting that the event 'could lose its gloss' (Cllr 'D') and 'important to keep the voting event as an 'exciting unusual activity' (Cllr 'F').

Denbighshire Officers: All three responses were very positive and highlighted different advantages based on their personal experiences. Officer 'A' commented on how PB can turn negative opinion into a positive outcome and the building of trust in a community which had previously lost confidence in the local authority. Officer 'B' has experienced the PB events as opportunities to draw rural communities together and re-engage with those technically termed 'hard to reach' groups. Officer 'C' had experienced the positive involvement of the wider community rather than just the end users.

SLT: Six responses did not express a view as they had not engaged with the PB process. The two colleagues who had had an involvement were positive about the experience highlighting several promising features of the event – social / professional interaction between the council and its residents and the difficult decisions some working groups (consisting of residents) had to make with limited funds at their disposal which educated them to the dilemma their elected representatives had to face.

Question 4 What was your perception of PB before attending a part of the process and has it changed following your participation or if you have not been involved what is your present perception of PB?

Councillors: There was initial scepticism about the PB process, particularly as the name 'Participatory Budgeting' was considered off-putting and had different connotations to different councillors. Without exception elected members perception of PB events had changed from mistrust and caution to a full - although sometimes qualified – ringing endorsement.

Denbighshire Officers: All were initially curious with slight scepticism before experiencing a PB event and its mechanism. Officers now see the real value of adopting a PB approach when applied to suitable situations with defined 'one off' sums of public money. Officer 'B' was of the view that it 'motivates communities to engage with the council' and breaks the traditional cycle of 'Services not always meeting the needs of communities'.

SLT: Again only the two SLT members who had experienced PB responded to this question. Both had serious reservations about the process but are both now advocates of the system and as one commented 'I was one of the doubters, before we even started, but I have been truly converted'.

Question 5 Do you think PB undermines the role of the local councillor (county, town or community) or does it enhance the role of councillors participating in the process and why?

Councillors: *All the councillors who responded did not think PB undermined their role, indeed most specifically commented that it enhanced their position in the community as the democratically elected member giving the community a voice and them the opportunity to listen and facilitate decisions. Again all councillors voiced the opinion that it did not undermine the role of councillor **provided councillors were themselves involved in the process**. Indeed some councillors felt that it should be a pre-requisite that the local councillor has to be involved in the various stages if the devolved sums came from DCC funds.*

Denbighshire Officers: All officers were of the view that PB has the potential to enhance the role of councillors provided the elected member engages with the process. Officer 'C' thought a commitment to PB by councillors demonstrated their trust in the community and valued their opinions.

SLT: None of the SLT members thought the use of PB undermined the democratic process indeed most thought it would enhance the role of elected members and 'could actually empower them, give them more influence and make them more accountable'. One SLT member who had experienced the PB commented 'this is the only process which has really involved our Members and Officers working together to deliver a project with and through the community'. There was, however a clear direction that PB should be used as a tool for improving a service and /or saving money, perhaps by attracting other match funding and should not be used as a gimmick or for political gain.

Question 6 Do you think PB should be used selectively dependant on the service or across all services and budgets or not at all. Please give your views.

Councillors: *There were two opposing views expressed by councillors. Some were of the view that it could be used across all Services and budgets whilst an equal number were of the opinion that PB should be confined to small selective projects. Coupled with the latter view was a concern amongst some that if extended to far the democratic process could be undermined with unelected people dictating how substantial budgets should be spent.*

Denbighshire Officers: Unanimous view of officers was that budgets could be used across most Services but should be 'selectively' deployed on specific activities with agreed budget parameters. Concern from officers that the process for each PB scheme is very labour intensive and Services do not have the capacity to undertake several PB projects without it being done by a 'corporate team'.

SLT: All were of the view that PB would be most appropriate on selective Services particularly where there is added value in residents making their own choices. Some also felt a danger of creating a complex new system if applied too broadly, possibly undermining the more regulated and accountable role of more formal local government systems.

5.4 Relevance of the questions posed

Although only six questions were posed, they were all open questions as it was the personal views and perceptions of the respondents that were important to this study. From experience the researcher was also aware of keeping the questionnaire short in order to encourage respondents to complete it as soon as it was received rather than respondents leaving it to complete at another time. Each question had its place in informing the research's objectives.

Table 4: Relevance of each question and its link to the Literature Review

Question	Relevance to research project	Link to Literature Review
Q1	The need to categorise the respondent enabled the researcher to ascertain if the views were of a councillor, facilitators or the SLT and did these views differ according to category.	Identify ideological differences between the council's executive and political leaders as suggested by Rocke (2008) or Cockell (2011)
Q2	Critical to the success and future adoption of PB as a mainstream budgetary tool is its endorsement by political leaders and their views on it undermining their position	How does the Denbighshire model meet the Big Society blueprint?
Q3	Having experienced PB respondents positive / negative views of the process are measured	Do views support the Porto Alegre doctrine presented by Santos (1998) or the sceptical Jones (2009) and Gaventa (2004)
Q4	Do respondent's opinions change after experiencing PB – positively or negatively?	Does the analysis support the view of the WPBU in terms of detractors are those who have not experienced the process
Q5	Linked to Q2 this question teases out the relationship councillors have with the process	As Q3
Q6	If there is broad agreement that PB should be promoted, should it be mainstreamed or targeted.	Analysis of the barriers to PB as identified in the Literature Review.

5.5 Summary of Chapter Five

This Chapter focuses on the two approaches taken to assimilate the research findings. It describes the process involved in establishing a PB event through the examination of a case study and an analysis of a questionnaire approach to establishing the views and perceptions of key practitioners and decision makers in developing PB as a strategic tool in community engagement. It concludes with a rationale for posing each question and its relevance to the study.

Chapter 6 Conclusion and implications

6.1 Introduction to Chapter Six

This Chapter will analyse the data collated in the previous Chapter and draw conclusions in respect of the future direction PB will play corporately in a local government setting. It will make recommendations based on the case study and questionnaire and provide a critique of the methodology used and the limitations of the study.

6.2 Conclusions derived from the case study and questionnaire

Lessons have been learned in expecting a community such as Cae Howell to become sufficiently motivated to participate without community capacity building. However, using a case study to demonstrate the process of PB has been a valuable exercise in identifying strengths and weaknesses of PB as an approach.

Its strengths were: delivering play equipment that the community voted for, a basic budget doubling in size due to the novelty of a public vote, building bridges between a sceptical and disengaged community.

Its weaknesses were: losing sight of the key objective, raising initial expectations and the difficulty of engaging with disaffected communities without substantial investment in capacity building.

The questionnaire analysis did not identify stark differences between the views of elected members, officers who facilitated PB events or the SLT. Indeed there appeared to be a consistent agreement between all three categories that PB was a

success and should be repeated but targeted to specific themes with perhaps the SLT taking a more strategic approach by looking at the 'bigger picture' in relation to potential community involvement in future fiscal policies. Chapter Seven will encapsulate the conclusions into a series of recommendations.

6.3 Critical Evaluation of Adopted Methodology

Key to delivering the objectives was the use of a case study and the observational approach undertaken to understand and critically examine its effectiveness. The researcher used 'primary' observation techniques in noting what happened and how the process of PB evolved whilst at the same time using 'experiential' data for recording perceptions and feelings as defined by Saunders *et al* (2009).

There are however threats to the reliability and validity of the research undertaken particularly in observing the case study. Participant observation is inevitably susceptible to observer bias and as Delbridge and Kirkpatrick (1994) comment *'because we are part of the social world we are studying we cannot detach ourselves from it, or for that matter avoid relying on our common sense knowledge and life experience when we try to interpret it'*. The researcher has consistently been aware of adopting this common sense approach and as Saunders *et al* advise *'we cannot avoid observer bias, all we can do is to be aware of the threat to reliability it poses and seek to control it'*.

The researcher outlines the ethical approach undertaken in Chapter Three and none of the observation sessions were compromised – although the researcher was asked for professional guidance by colleagues at some of the Planning and Steering Group sessions.

Similarly the use of a questionnaire directed to key senior managers, facilitating officers and elected members was a successful methodology in harnessing the views, perceptions and future aspirations of the council's decision makers.

6.4 Correlation between the study and the Literature Review

Like many other public sector organisations Denbighshire prides itself on its relationship with its residents and had a relatively good track record of communication and consultation. Public participation and engagement, however is a new concept for most local authorities in Wales as authorities move from the informing and listening approach to Graham and Phililips (1998) model of *'deliberate and active engagement of citizens by the council – outside the electoral process – in making policy decisions or in setting strategic direction'*.

Indeed the council can learn lessons from some of the larger English authorities who are now trialling, under the banner of the Big Society, devolving mainstream budgets to the community through a 'budget congress' with the community having a voice in core spending decisions (Wallace 2011). There is an underlying acceptance by Denbighshire that it has, as mooted by Ranson & Stewart (1998), a duty to enter into a dialogue with its residents and as a further correlation with the Literature Review like most public sector bodies Denbighshire has significantly moved from just 'Public Service' to that of 'Public Governance'.

Undertaking a case study in a deprived housing estate with high levels of unemployment and predominantly low income families has been a challenge to colleagues who have grappled with the reluctance of the community to engage at all with the process even if it was of direct benefit to them as individuals. This study does add weight to Brodie *et al* and others identified in the Literature Review who

are of the view that only certain sections of the community will participate. It was interesting to note that the majority of those who did participate had never been inside the Town Hall previously despite it being the cultural and civic hub of the town.

Sceptics of PB such as the views of Jones (2009) and Brodie et al (2009) proffer the view that it challenges the democratic position of elected members. Although this research did not canvass the views of councillors who had no experience of PB, it does conclude that those questioned were adamant the process actually enhanced their position as chosen representatives asking the views of their constituents.

Respondents to the questionnaire and in particular the facilitating officers confirmed the concerns mooted by Lawrence and Deagan (2001) that PB is a time consuming addition to their posts and in the Cae Howell event placed significant time pressures on Leisure Officers.

6.5 Conclusions about the Research Question

The question posed by this dissertation referred to 'doorstep democracy' and PB 'supporting collective wisdom'.

The experience of the 'Cae Howell' case study would seem to substantiate the claim that PB reaches the doorstep of individuals that other avenues of consultation have previously failed. Cae Howell also offers a cautionary tale, namely that had the PB event not focussed exclusively on that deprived area of the town and strenuous effort made to engage with this area of the town and had been open to other parts of the town – it is safe to assume that the Cae Howell area would have received nothing.

Secondly does PB support collective wisdom? The conclusions derived at from the results of the questionnaire and in particular the case study would appear to support

the premise of Bill Ellis-Jones (Programme Manager for the WPBU): *'One will occasionally come across negative attitudes to PB, and these are invariably from those who have never experienced it. Once experienced, no-one wants to let it go. Not every organisation or community will think PB adds value to what they do. Not everyone will think it's for them but what isn't at issue is whether it works or not. When done well, the evidence of its benefits is incontrovertible'*.

The aim of this dissertation as outlined in the opening chapter has been to examine the role of PB within a local government context. The Denbighshire case study and analysis of the views of key decision makers in the county council will not only inform the process but will provide the basis for the council making a strategic policy decision on the future adoption of PB as a mainstream engagement and community empowering tool.

Has this research demonstrated a key objective as outlined in Chapter One that PB has its use in the allocation of mainstream budgets? The analysis of the questionnaires would appear to rule this out in the short term (the next twelve months); however there is strong support for a substantial devolved PB budget targeted specifically to themes and geographic locations. This indeed is in itself a bold and imaginative move and according to the WPBU places Denbighshire as a flagship PB authority.

To satisfy Wales' regulatory bodies such as the Wales Audit Commission, ESTYN, the Welsh Language Board and the Wales Government, the public sector in Wales needs to demonstrate the involvement of local people in setting priorities with examples of how feedback is taken account of in its corporate plans. Indeed Central Government is establishing local authority pilots on many different strands of

participation and community empowerment as the Rt. Hon. Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government remarked in a recent Conference Keynote Speech: *'The best public bodies don't assume they have to do things the way they always have. They ask fundamental questions about how services are run, who is running them and whether they really offer the best possible value to the taxpayer'* (Capita's 3rd National Conference 'Delivering Community Based Budgets', London, March 2011.).

This national view is reflected locally by the approach of Denbighshire's Chief Executive in his response to the researcher's questioning. *'For me PB offers the potential to pool respective skills to make a positive impact on a local area: local residents (knowledge of issues + clarity about what they want), officers (some knowledge of issues + knowledge of how to get things done) and finally elected members (some knowledge of issues + democratic accountability).'*

6.6 Limitations

Although the researcher was fortunate in having the opportunity to observe and evaluate a PB scheme in Denbighshire from its inception to its conclusion, timing has mitigated against observing other events outside the county. It is recognised therefore that one event limits the validity of making generalisations; however it does in most aspects mirror the secondary research identified earlier by the work of the Institute of Social Studies of Andalucía and more latterly the University of Glamorgan.

Although there was a good response to the questionnaire, it was deliberately restricted to those who had an experience of PB.

6.7 Opportunities for Further Research

Denbighshire is at the start of a long journey in its strategic aim of 'getting closer to the community' and there will be opportunities in the future to harness the knowledge gained in adopting the principles of PB corporately or on a themed basis – and further community empowering initiatives can be the subject of further research which will greatly inform the future direction of the council.

6.8 Summary of Chapter Six

This Chapter seeks to build on the key findings of the research and make rational conclusions by comparing the results of this study and the academic research found in the Literature Review and identify correlating or conflicting evidence.

Chapter Seven Recommendations

7.1 Introduction to Chapter Seven

This Chapter outlines the key recommendations based on the research undertaken and is underpinned by assumptions formed from the Literature Review.

7.2 Recommendations

1. The results of the questionnaire clearly advocate the continuation of PB events and its development to include all Services of the council
2. The use of PB in the short term (1 year) be limited to specifically selective projects or geographic areas.
3. A defined budget is agreed specifically to 'pump –prime' several PB schemes in the county.
4. Key decision making members of the Senior Leadership Team have the opportunity of observing PB events.
5. An acknowledgement that PB can be labour intensive and human resources are an integral ingredient to its success
6. Awareness that PB could lose its appeal if overused.

7.3 Implementation Plan

To complement the recommendations an implementation plan is suggested to ensure the lessons learned from the case study and analysis of the questionnaire form a springboard for PB to become a cornerstone of the council's future public engagement strategy and programme.

Table 5 : Recommendations and Implementation Plan

No	Specific Recommendation	Action By	Timescale
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		Whom	
1	Present the key findings of this research to the Corporate Executive Team (CET) with a recommendation of an allocated budget for PB	D. Davies	Report and attendance at CET (achieved in June 2011) Further report and attendance at CET – Nov 2011
2	Key lessons learnt from the case study to underpin an internal 'guide on how to use PB'	D. Davies	Dec 2011
3	Establishment of PB Working Group to develop corporate direction.	Corporate Director - Communities	In place (established April 2011)
4	Feedback from questionnaires to those who participated	D. Davies	Oct 2011
5	Key staff and councillors have the opportunity of observing PB events	PB Working Group	Oct 2011 – March 2012

7.4 Summary of Chapter Seven

This final chapter builds on the conclusions reached previously and seeks to link the understanding of the subject with a series of recommendations for future actions by the council supported by a suggested implementation plan.

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APPENDIX I

Questionnaire to respondents

Annwyl Gyfaill / Dear Colleague

I wonder if you could assist me in a piece of research I am doing for my Masters Degree. My dissertation is on the use of Participatory Budgeting (PB) as a mechanism for engaging with the community and using council funds to assist in the process. I have chosen a selection of county, town and community councillors, town and community council clerks and officers to assist by answering some questions and would greatly value your contribution to this academic research.

I can assure you that the information you provide and your views will be on an anonymous basis and no particular view will be attributed to a named councillor, clerk or officer. Although the information collated is for the purposes of my degree dissertation, the collective findings may be useful in shaping Denbighshire's future direction in adopting PB as an engagement tool throughout the council. I may quote a particular remark made by you in the study but its source will not be identified.

Some of you may have had an experience of PB in your community and it is this experience I wish to capture, and in particular whether you have a positive or negative view of PB based on your personal experience of the process. I would still appreciate your views even if you have had no direct experience of PB as I am also interested in your perception of the ethos of PB and whether it is an appropriate vehicle for spending public money and public engagement.

Just to remind you of what PB is all about here is a short definition: **'Participatory budgeting directly involves local people in making decisions on the spending and priorities for a defined public budget. This means engaging residents and community groups representative of all parts of the community to discuss spending priorities, making spending proposals and vote on them, as well as giving local people a role in the scrutiny and monitoring of the process'**.

Your response via e-mail would be appreciated, however you may wish to have an informal telephone conversation and I am more than happy to make contact with you.

Q1 For the following questions to be analysed in terms of your role in the PB process were you a voting participant, observer, support staff or have you had no involvement in a PB event?

Q2 What is your view of defined public funds being devolved to the community to spend rather than by elected councillors or officers?

Q3 Was your experience of a PB event a negative or positive one and why?

Q4 What was your perception of PB before attending a part of the process and has it changed following your participation **or** if you have not been involved what is your present perception of PB?

Q5 Do you think PB undermines the role of the local councillor (county, town or community) or does it enhance the role of councillors participating in the process and why?

Q6 Do you think PB should be used selectively dependant on the service **or** across all services and budgets **or** not at all. Please give your views.

An early response would be greatly appreciated.
Diolch yn fawr am eich amser / Thank you very much for your time.

David

David W Davies
Rheolwr Ymrwymiad Cymunedol / Community Engagement Manager

APPENDIX II

Press coverage of the 'Cae Hywel' PB event

