

# What is Blackburn Community Choices?

---



Blackburn Community Choices is a process that enables local communities to decide how public funding is spent. It aims to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals and families in Blackburn and is a pilot project as part of the wider development of Participatory Budgeting (PB) in West Lothian.

This was originally launched back in February 2020 but had to be postponed due to COVID-19. It is now being re-launched to give groups and organisations the opportunity to help meet the needs of their community at this time, building on the resilience and strength that has been shown over the last few months and to make sure that local people have the opportunity now more than ever to be involved in how we support communities.

‘Blackburn’s Future’ regeneration plan was created by the local regeneration group, Blackburn’s Futures Group. The plan sets out the key issues for Blackburn and actions to tackle these. The main priority area that the plan seeks to address is **Poverty, Health and Wellbeing**: The issues identified in the plan are based on findings from extensive consultation and engagement with the community, information from official statistics and the local knowledge of community workers and organisations. The findings from community engagement through the development of the Regeneration Plan have shaped the aims of Blackburn Community Choices so funding will be allocated to projects based on the needs of the local community. Given the situation that has developed over the last 9 months, it is considered that these themes are still significant and all the more relevant in the local community.

Blackburn Community Choices therefore provides a real opportunity for local people to have an input as to how public funding is spent to address some of the issues identified through the Regeneration Planning process and that have arisen over the last 9 months.

£25,000 has been allocated to the community of Blackburn to address health and wellbeing in the area through this participatory budgeting pilot. This process gives groups and organisations the opportunity to apply for funding and local people the chance to vote on what projects should receive funding. This way of allocating money gives groups and organisations an opportunity to show how their project can improve an aspect of health and wellbeing in Blackburn and allows members of the community to decide how the money is spent.

## Who can apply?

---

In order to apply for funding, you must;

- Be a constituted voluntary or community organisation or registered charity
- Have a bank account in the name of the group or organisation that has two signatories who are not related or live at the same address.
- Be able to offer provision for the community of Blackburn.
- Demonstrate how your idea or project addresses at least one of the priorities stated in the guidance.

Please note that Community Choices provides one off grants made to fund new activity. They are not intended to fund the continuation of existing activity or ongoing running costs for your organisation.

If you have any questions regarding the application process, please email [community.planning@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:community.planning@westlothian.gov.uk) or contact Susan Gordon ([susan.gordon@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:susan.gordon@westlothian.gov.uk)) (Monday-Wednesday) or Graham Whitelaw ([graham.whitelaw@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:graham.whitelaw@westlothian.gov.uk)).

## What can the funding be used for?

---

Only costs directly associated with the development and delivery of the project will be funded. The list below is not definitive but gives some examples:

We can fund	We can't fund
✓ Equipment	✗ Contingency costs, loans, endowments or interest
✓ One-off events	✗ Electricity generation and feed in tariff payments
✓ Small land or building projects	✗ Political or religious activity
✓ Staff costs	✗ Fundraising activity
✓ Training costs	✗ VAT you can reclaim
✓ Transport	✗ Statutory activities
✓ Volunteer expenses	
✓ New services	
✓ Partnerships	

## What should your project address?

---

Applications must demonstrate that your project or idea meets at least one of the priority areas detailed below. These have been identified through the development of Blackburn's Regeneration Plan 'Blackburn's Future'. These issues have become more severe over the last 9 months, therefore it's even more important that we look at ways to address them. Your project or idea should seek address the issues below.

1. Mental Health & Wellbeing: *Improving mental health and wellbeing and building resilience in individuals and communities*
2. Children Living in Poverty: *Tackling inequalities with a specific focus on children and their families who are living in poverty*
3. Healthy Living: *Increasing physical activity and exercise, by reducing barriers that impact on physical activity levels, promotion and support for healthy life choices around food and reducing barriers to making healthy life choices*

## How much can we apply for?

---

You can apply for any amount up to £5000.

\*If we don't receive enough applications to allocate the full amount, applicants will be consulted to discuss whether they could utilise more of the funding.

## How to apply

---

To apply for funding, you must complete and return an application form by **Friday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020**.

**Please note that the information you provide in the application form will be used to provide a summary of your project which will be posted on the webpage to give local people information on which to base their vote.**

Completed application forms should be sent to [community.planning@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:community.planning@westlothian.gov.uk). For more information please contact Susan Gordon ([susan.gordon@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:susan.gordon@westlothian.gov.uk)) (Monday-Wednesday) or Graham Whitelaw ([graham.whitelaw@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:graham.whitelaw@westlothian.gov.uk))

## Who decides how the funding is spent?

---

Projects will initially be independently verified to ensure they meet the application criteria outlined below. The information on the projects that meet the criteria will be posted on our webpage and publicised and members of the local community of Blackburn will be invited to vote on the projects they feel best meet the needs of Blackburn. Voting will take place in early 2021 and it is anticipated that funds will be released to successful projects by the middle of February 2021.

## Assessment Criteria

---

<b>The following criteria will be used in checking eligibility of applications</b>
Be a constituted voluntary or community organisation or registered charity
Have a bank account that has two signatories who are not related or live at the same address
Be able to offer provision for the community of Blackburn
Not already be in receipt of monies from the Council for the project or idea; applications should be for new activity, not for the continuation of existing activity.
Demonstrate how your idea or project meets at least one of the priorities stated in the guidance
Demonstrate what difference the project will make
Demonstrate who will benefit from the project
Be able to deliver the project within 12 months

## Monitoring of projects

---

This is a pilot project therefore evaluation of the participatory budgeting process and the impact of the projects will be carried out and used to learn for future activity. Projects will be monitored to ensure that they achieve what they set out to. Successful projects will be asked to report on progress within around 6 months of receiving the funding. This will involve a presentation to the Blackburn Futures Group who have responsibility for the Blackburn Futures Plan. A final update will be required after one year which will include a financial report on your spend in relation to your application and the return of any unallocated funding from the project.

## Next Steps

---

Once you have submitted your application, West Lothian Council will;

- ✓ Confirm we have received your application
- ✓ Assess your application against criteria; if we need to clarify anything about your application we may contact by email.
- ✓ Complete assessment/verification process
- ✓ Inform you if your application meets the initial criteria. If not successful we will give you feedback on the reasons why.
- ✓ Publicise the webpage for online voting to encourage local people to vote.

- ✓ Count and verify the votes cast
- ✓ Inform you if your project was successful in getting enough votes to receive funding. If so;
- ✓ Send you a formal offer and release the funds

You will then:

- ✓ Send an update on activity and spend within 6 months of receiving the funding
- ✓ Provide a final update after one year of receiving the funding