

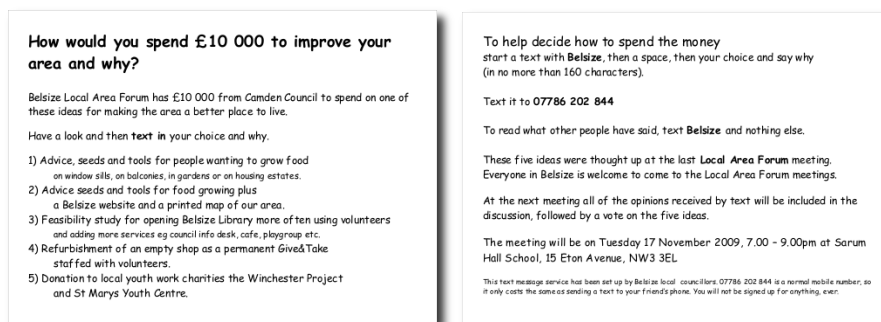
“We are 6 mums and we'd like to plead with you about giving the Winch Project funds so it could carry on the wonderful activities for the children. Please as it is the only chance for all low income families. Please.”

Using Thumbprint City to Get People Involved in Democracy

In Autumn 2009, Camden council gave £10 000 to each ward in the borough and asked the people living there to decide how to spend it. The decision was to be made through a process of discussion and voting organised by ward councillors.

In the Belsize ward, councillors Alexis Rowell and Tom Simon used Thumbprint City to involve as many people as they could in the decision making process.

Alexis and Tom printed 400 simple, text only, black and white leaflets asking “How would you spend £10 000 to improve your area and why?” and distributed them in a handful of supermarkets, cafes, shops and pubs in the ward.



The leaflet gave people five options that had been worked out at an earlier ward forum meeting, and asked them to say which one they would choose to spend the money on, and more importantly, why?

To take part, people sent a text to Thumbprint City:

- “As a mother of a 16 month old girl i would love the library to be open more and have improved facilities. Anna bernstein.”
- “advice seeds tools plus a website because so many people want to get growing and just need that initial physical prompt that seeds etc would give and website would provide local support and encouragement. Debbie Bourne
- “My son has become a very social lad thanks to the staff and experiences he has had with the winchester project , a wonderful place.”

37 messages were received in three weeks.

All of the messages sent in gave well thought out and often passionate reasons for how the money should be spent, showing that the “and why?” part of the question was very important. Rather than just casting a vote in a more convenient way, people sending the texts thought about and tried to explain to other people what they valued in their

community. In the case of the “six mums” quoted at the start of this case study, they talked as a group about what they valued, and composed a message together to express that.

All of the texts were published on the Thumbprint City page for Belsize, creating a way for people to listen to each others voices, and making a record of things that people in the area care about. The messages on this page can be read by text message as well as on the web. www.thumbprintcity.com/london/belsize

Alexis and Tom were convinced that most of these messages came from people who wouldn't otherwise have taken part in the process.

All of the messages sent in to Thumbprint City received an automatic “thank you” text in reply, telling people about the final discussion and decision on how to spend the money:

- Thanks for your idea. Please come and take part in the discussion and vote on Tuesday 17 November, 7-9pm at Sarum Hall School, 15 Eton Avenue, NW3 3EL

At the final decision making meeting, Alexis and Tom acted as representatives of the people who had sent in messages, reading out some of the texts and reporting on the balance of choices expressed in the 37 messages and the reasons why.

The final choice was made by a vote of the people present at the decision making meeting, and the winner was the Winchester Project, a young people's organisation. This choice also reflected the balance of opinion among the people who sent in texts.

Councillor Alexis Rowell said afterwards “Using Thumbprint City definitely led to a net increase in participation in the democratic process in Belsize. It probably made up almost doubled the participation in the local area forum vote.”

The cost of using Thumbprint City to involve people in democracy in Belsize was £5, the cost of ink and paper for printing 400 A5 leaflets on a desktop printer.

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At Thumbprint Co-operative we love doing things like this - it's why we are here - so if you are interested in doing something similar we are always happy to offer any advice and expertise we can to help come up with a plan.

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