



# Participation Requests Annual Report

2017/18

## 1. Introduction

This is our Council's first ever Participation Requests Annual Report. While it evidences the proactive approach we have undertaken to promote the availability of this empowerment facility.

This first year has been built on our PR Strategy which is all about empowering local people to be more engaged with our Council.

We are pleased to have received some expressions of interest in Participation Requests as this demonstrates awareness of its availability. The fact that we have proactively managed these through discussion with the groups and therefore no formal Requests have been submitted means we can be confident that our informal engagement is effective and we are giving a positive welcome to suggestions. This is very much in the spirit of the Strategy and Regulations.

## 2. Legislative Requirements

Section 26 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 requires the Council to set out, in a published annual report, how it has promoted and supported Participation Requests, numbers of Participation Requests received and the outcomes of these requests. Specifically:

- Promotion of Participation Requests- anything the relevant authority has done to promote the use of participation requests and support community transfer bodies to make requests.
- Number of Participation Requests received and those agreed/ refused/ appealed with reasons, specifically:
  - how many participation requests were received
  - how many requests were agreed to or refused
  - the number of requests that resulted in changes to a public service provided by or on behalf of the public service authority

### 3. Promotion of Participation Requests and Support to Community Bodies

#### **Council Policy Intent to Support Communities**

3.1 The Council agreed its Participation Request Strategy and Procedure in September 2017. Promotion of Participation Requests and support to community bodies to make participation requests was considered to be very important by Members throughout the development of the PR Strategy and Procedure. In early strategy development seminars Elected Members expressed their commitment to supporting communities to benefit from PR

3.2 The Council Strategy states the following policy intent:  
to strengthen communities' opportunities to influence and participate in our Council's outcomes.

The primary purpose is community benefit with a secondary aspect that the Council wants communities to be involved in the design and delivery of services as that produces better services tailored to people's needs. Participation Requests are therefore not just about a formal mechanism for communities to have their voices heard. PR is part of a wider picture in helping communities to co- produce and deliver services that meet local needs.

3.3 The strategy goes on to say that the Council is already very proactive about community engagement and empowerment and has other ways for communities to be heard, including the Community Participation and Engagement Strategy. Within the strategy PR is seen as “a formal mechanism for engagement with the Council. Our hope is that as we work to ensure good informal dialogue then the need for formal approached will be the exception rather than the rule”.

#### 3.4 Listening to Community Groups and Stakeholders

Consultation with community groups, benchmarking with other Councils, Elected Members and officers indicated that the Strategy and Procedure required to address the following issues:

1. Stakeholders found PR difficult to understand and wanted straightforward guidance to know how they can influence Council outcomes.
2. A single point of contact for communities, to allow them to have a conversation with the Council rather than phoning around departments.
3. Support to develop their ideas
4. For the process to be non bureaucratic
5. To receive feedback on PRs;
6. To have their ideas heard

The Council agreed 4 objectives for PR which are both about promotion of CAT and supporting community groups via the process:

Objective 1

To promote PR as a key aspect of community empowerment.

Objective 2

To support community groups throughout the PR process

Objective 3

To ensure transparency and fairness in our decision-making

Objective 4

To respond positively to the improvements suggested through PR.

#### 4. Support for Community Groups

4.1 The resultant action plan based on stakeholder input to develop the Strategy included:

- ensure that documentation is clear and easy to access
- develop clear procedures for PR which sets out step by step how a PR request is developed and put into place including a flow chart
- the development of a PR website offering clear guidance and procedures
- training and development of key officers from other departments and ward officers to support communities.
- Develop ward officers expertise in PR
- provide a single point of contact so that community groups can have an early conversation about their ideas and help navigate Council services.
- dialogue across Council directorates
- signposting groups to other sources of support including Third Sector Interface and national organisations such as SCDC
- the setting up of an appeals panel comprising Elected members not involved in the original decision making committee.

All of these actions have been developed and are detailed below:

##### Documentation that is clear and easy to access

4.2 All documentation for CAT is kept to a bare minimum and ward officers support groups to complete documentation where required. The starting point is an invitation to discussion and support is provided at the earliest possible stage. Groups receive extensive officer support throughout the development of their business plans.

##### Development of Clear Procedures

4.3 The development of clear procedures in developing our Procedures, we engaged with key stakeholders to seek their view. In summary applicants wanted: a conversation and a local point of contact they could talk to. They wanted a simplified, non bureaucratic process for applying for PR. These views were included in the design of the procedure and accompanying materials in the website. They were also reflected in the approach the Council takes to PR which is based around dialogue and face to face support, building confidence and community capacity to take on challenges. There is a willingness to keep bureaucracy to a minimum. These approaches build community confidence in the process and help promote PR. The whole approach the Council takes towards better engagement with communities and the increasing willingness of Council services to listen to and take on board constructive ideas from stakeholders can mitigate the need for more formal approaches.

##### PR Website

4.4 The creation of the PR website. The website invites applicants to a discussion, minimises use of jargon and bureaucracy and offers a single point of contact. It contains all required advice and proforma for making an application. It also invites community groups to have a conversation and offers a single point of contact. It signposts to all ways to have a conversation with the Council, not only via the formal process of PR, Groups may decide to take another route to getting their ideas heard. The Council's PR procedure is promoted on social media- links to the PR website are promoted through the Council's Facebook and Twitter pages.

#### Training and Development of Key Officers

4.5 The Council has identified link officers from each of its directorates to form a link officer team. These officers have received training in PR and also from the Consultation Institute. They work with the Community Development and Empowerment Manager to have early engagement with community groups to help develop thinking around participation requests. The link officers provide detail and information regarding their service which informs conversation with the groups and helps develop outcome focussed reflection. Third Sector Partners. Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway was very actively involved in developing the Council's Strategy and Procedure and promotes PR to community groups

#### Development of Ward Officer Expertise in PR

4.6 Ward Officers have received training in PR. The Council has a ward officer in each Council ward. The ward officer actively promotes PR and assists local groups where required.

Information to Community Councils. All Community Councils received information on PR and the website link.

#### Provide a single point of contact

4.7 The Council's PR website invites community participation bodies to an initial conversation and offers an initial point of contact via the Community Development and Empowerment Manager. Thereafter, a single point of contact is assigned to help the group navigate the Council.

#### Dialogue across Council Directorates

4.8 Each Directorate has a PR link officer who provides the link between the community group and their Directorate to make it possible and easy for the group to have discussion with those services. The link officer feeds discussion back to their management team and assists with the development of the Outcome Improvement Plan as required.

5. Number of Participation Requests

5.1 The Council's Procedure works on the basis of an initial invitation to a discussion. To date the Council has had discussion with four groups and one individual.

In two cases the expression of interest led to the groups deciding to engage with the services involved and finding resolution to the issue by that means. In both cases the service adjusted its practice to accommodate the suggestions of the community group, however this was agreed informally; there was no formal request from either group and hence no formal outcome improvement plan or process. Resolution was achieved through existing engagement processes.

5.2 In the two other cases discussions with the groups are ongoing and assistance is being offered to the groups to develop their plans.

Following discussion with officers, the individual is consulting with his community to ascertain interest and support for his proposal,

In no case have any of these expressions of interest been followed up by to a formal Participation Request.