



Participation Request Strategy

Contents *(page numbers will be added when final)*

1. Introduction
2. Definitions
3. Context
 - 3.1 National
 - 3.2 Regional
 - 3.3 Our Council
4. Development of the Strategy
5. Our Objectives
6. Delivering and monitoring the Strategy
7. Participation Request Forum
8. Evaluating the impact of the Strategy
9. Working in Partnership

Annex 1 – Strategies and Plans that contribute to the Participation Requests Strategy

Annex 2 - Participation Request Strategy Action Plan

1. Introduction

The policy intent of this Strategy was agreed by the Communities Committee on 13 June 2017 as follows:

“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 (PR) are therefore not just about a formal mechanism for communities to have their voice heard. PR is part of a wider picture in helping communities to co-produce and deliver services that meet local needs.

The Council’s proactive approach to community engagement already includes a range of Strategies aimed at increasing and promoting opportunities for communities to engage with the Council and influence outcomes.

Our Council values local empowerment, respects our communities, works in partnership with communities to sustain services. We do not want to do things “to” communities but rather want to do things “with” communities.

The Community Participation and Engagement Strategy and the Community Asset Transfer Strategy in particular allow individuals and communities routes to express their views and participate in delivering outcomes for their communities. The Council has for many years adopted the National Standards for Community Engagement and staff across a wide range of Directorates have recently trained with the Consultation Institute to develop their expertise.

Participation Requests will form one aspect of the Council’s approach to community empowerment – combined with greater engagement, participatory democracy and supported volunteering there is great potential for a more equal relationship between our Council and our communities when working together.

Participation Requests are a formal mechanism for dialogue with the Council. Our hope is that as we work to ensure good opportunities for informal dialogue then the need for formal approaches will be the exception rather than the rule.

We want to leave a legacy of skills within the local community; our support should leave community groups more empowered and with a greater range of abilities and experience to take on other challenges.

Participation Requests are about empowering communities, (both geographic and communities of interest). We want to ensure that our approach to Participation Requests is fully inclusive and is open and available to the widest range of groups, taking into account barriers to participation that may exist, or be perceived to exist. Our approach to promoting information about Participation Requests will be mindful of and actively promote, through narrative and imagery, the inclusion of groups whose voices are not always or often heard. We will work with the Dumfries and Galloway Equality and Diversity Working Group (EDWG) to ensure that our approaches and materials are as inclusive as we can make them. We will look to hear and become aware of any barriers which may exist and work with partners to remove these. We will also work with the EDWG around monitoring and analysis of the Participation Requests we receive (personal information will be redacted), to ensure that we are fully aware of any underrepresentation from protected characteristic groups and can work with partners to ensure that we increase focus on opening up channels to maximise opportunities for participation.

2. Definitions

Throughout the Participation Request Strategy and the associated Procedure, there are certain terms which are used – some are drawn from the legislation and some have been developed for use in Dumfries and Galloway Council. Here is an explanation of what they mean:

Term	Definition
Community Asset Transfer Strategy	Community Asset Transfer is about the transfer of buildings or land owned by the Council into community ownership or lease to benefit community plans and ambitions.
Compliant Application	An application will only be accepted when it is fully completed with all sections fully considered and detailed and the group is able to evidence that it is community led and fits the governance requirements for a Community Participation Body.
Outcome Improvement Plan	An outcome is the result of actions and plans. For example the outcome of creating activities for and with older people might be improved mental and physical health and a reduction in doctors' visits.
Participation and Engagement Strategy	The Community participation and Engagement Strategy outlines our Councils approach to involving communities of place and communities of interest in the way plan and deliver services.
Participation Request	A participation request is a formal mechanism for Community Participation Bodies to participate in the design, delivery or adjustment of services.
Community Participation Body (CPB)	A Community Participation Body is the Government's term for a community group which has the appropriate governance to carry out a Participation Request.
Volunteer Strategy	The Volunteer Strategy defines the Council's approach to working with volunteers, including the rights and responsibility of volunteers.
Sustainable	this means that a service improvement outcome needs to be maintained for a period of time within reasonable budgets to the benefit of the community.

3. Context

3.1 National

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (CE(S)A) 2015 and associated Guidance and Regulation – this legislation has a specific focus on Participation Requests to provide a formal mechanism for communities to put forward their ideas for how Council services might be changed to improve outcomes and to request to participate in achieving these outcomes. On 1 April 2017 Scottish Government enacted secondary legislation - the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 (Regulations) – relating to Participation Requests.

Key aspects of the regulations are:-

- A CPB puts forward a Participation Request to the public body asking them to take part in a process that will improve the outcome set out by the community body.
- The public body must agree to the request and set up a process unless there are reasonable grounds for refusal.
- At the end of the process the public body must publish a report on whether the outcomes were improved and how the CPB contributed to that improvement.
- The maximum turnaround time for dealing with a Participation Request is usually 30 days.

The presumption in the Act shifts the balance of power clearly towards the community bodies by requiring Councils and other public bodies to agree the request unless there are reasonable grounds for refusal.

Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services – this Commission, chaired by Campbell Christie, highlighted that if they are to be effective, public services must empower individuals and communities by involving them in both the design and delivery of services. It advocated a fundamental overhaul of the relationships between institutions responsible for delivering public services and the needs of individuals and communities.

3.2 Regional

Participation Request arrangements across public sector partners - All public service authorities are subject to the CE(S)A 2015 Regulation and Guidance but the different legislative and decision-making routes mean that a common approach is not practicable. However, procedures and documentation are being shared to ensure consistency wherever possible to make it as straightforward as possible for community groups.

The Council is working with the Community Planning Executive Group as the key platform for partners to share their developing Strategies and Procedures regarding Participation Requests.

3.3 Our Council

Priorities and Commitments – Priority Four; to be an inclusive Council’ and a specific Commitment ‘ensure that local people and communities are at the heart of our decision-making’. Our Progressive Partnership Agreement, submitted to Dumfries and Galloway Council in June 2017, reaffirms the Elected Members’ commitment to this agenda.

Communities Directorate The vision for Communities Directorate in the Council is: “enabling communities to take increased responsibility for the prioritisation, management and ownership of services and community assets”.

Reshape Programme – the Programme agreed by Full Council in December 2014 provided for a Service Review on Enabling Community Empowerment and its findings were reported to the Customer and Communities Committee in March 2016. Community Engagement was a particular area for further development and giving communities a greater voice in influencing how Council services are delivered. One of the key principles to “organise our services to meet the needs of service users, encouraging an open Council approach that puts customers first, enabling us to support community development”. In addition to “ensure local people are at the heart of our decision making process across all services”.

4. Development of the Strategy

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 stresses that the spirit of Participation Requests is to create a more equal relationship between public authorities and communities.

The Council has a number of Strategies aim to achieve this beyond the formal process of Participation Requests and if properly carried out should lessen the frequency of formal requests. These Strategies include Community Participation and Engagement, Volunteering and Community Asset Transfer.

The Council wishes to have good ongoing, open day to day relationships with communities and the formal approach of Participation Requests should not be seen as the first or only channel for dialogue with the Council. The Council will continue to develop ways to better engage, involve and empower communities.

Our Strategy has been built on feedback from communities, individuals and community groups about previous and current engagement around influencing Council services.; benchmarking and experience from other councils; national and best practice advice' consultation with Elected Members, local partners and hard to reach groups; and Impact Assessment. The Third sector Interface has made a strong contribution to the development of the Strategy.

4.1 Feedback from communities, individuals and community councils:

Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) research with community groups, representative groups of minority communities; staff focus groups; and individual interviews.

4.2 Benchmarking and experience of other councils

Analysis of Strategies and discussions with a wide range of other councils in Scotland particularly Fife, Dundee, East Ayrshire, Scottish Borders and Orkney

4.3 National and best practice advice

Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland
Scottish Community Development Centre
Third Sector, Dumfries and Galloway

4.4 Consultation with Senior Leadership Team and Elected Members

- Briefing and discussion session – 26 July and 15 August 2017

4.5 Consultation with local partners

- Community Learning and Development Partners' Strategy Policy Group; and Trades Unions – discussions – June and August 2017

4.6 Consultation with the Community Planning Equality and Diversity Group

- Representative organisations for Protected Characteristics particularly age, disability, gender, race, sexuality and religion – facilitated discussion – August 2017

4.7 Consultation with Community Planning Partners

Community Planning Executive Group on 16 August 2017

4.8 Stakeholder Impact Assessment

The Strategy and Procedure presented in this report were considered using the Council's Impact Assessment Toolkit. No negative impacts have been identified. A copy of the Impact Assessment Summary is available:

www.dumgal.gov.uk/commplan/index.aspx?articleid=10936

4.9 What did meetings with stakeholder groups tell us?

- It is hard to understand what our rights are regarding Participation Requests. We need straightforward guidance and we need to know how we can influence how the Council does things.
- Having one point of contact will allow us to have a conversation with the Council rather than phoning round a lot of Council departments
- When we talk to the Council we want them to listen and take our concerns seriously. We don't want to be consulted, we want to be involved.
- It can be hard to influence the Council. We are smaller and with less resource. We may need practical support to develop our ideas.
- Third sector, Dumfries and Galloway and the Council both work with us. We need both organisations to be talking to each other and have clarity on roles.
- We are keen to improve Council services and would like our ideas to be heard.
- We don't want to take time to submit a request only to have it rejected for things
- we want to be told earlier in the process- we need early guidance
- We want people to talk to us rather than to engage in a bureaucratic process
- When we put forward a request we want to know that it has made a difference- we want feedback
- We want to be reflected and included. There are groups in our communities which are more likely to participate if the narrative and imagery used to promote Participation Requests reflects their community of interest.

5. Our Objectives

In order to achieve the policy intent of the Strategy we have identified four specific Objectives which will shape the detailed activity we undertake:

Objective 1

To promote Participation Requests as a key aspect of community empowerment.

Objective 2

To support community groups throughout the Participation Request process

Objective 3

To ensure transparency and fairness in our decision-making

Objective 4

To respond positively to the improvements suggested through Participation Requests

6. Delivering and monitoring the Strategy

Delivering the Strategy

Objective 1 - To promote Participation Requests as a key aspect of community empowerment.

- We will develop Participation Request webpage to promote make available advice, guidance and sources of support to those wishing to pursue Participation Requests.
- We will publish examples of good practice and other Participation Requests to show community groups what can be done
- We will encourage dialogue with community groups across all Council Directorates as part of an ongoing programme of work about community empowerment
- In the narrative and imagery we use to promote Participation requests we will be mindful of the diversity to ensure that all communities feel this includes them.

Objective 2 - To support community groups throughout the Participation Request process

- We will set out clear Procedures for a Participation Request
 - Alongside this Strategy is a detailed Procedure which sets out step by step how a Participation Request is developed and put into place. A flowchart is also available summarising the individual stages and timescales.
- Training and development
 - Officers across the Council are being trained in the Participation Request Procedure
 - The Ward Officers have, and will continue to develop, expertise in capacity building and working with community groups, to develop their skills and abilities in all requirements.
- Other associated skills such as Plain English and engagement techniques are also part of continuing professional development for officers in all Directorates. Equalities training will feature for all ward officers.

- Support for community groups.

This is a significant aspect of the Strategy and the Procedure gives details of the different types of support and options available to community groups to maximise their potential for undertaking a Participation Request. There are three specific aspects to this support:

 - Providing a single point of contact – the Community Development and Empowerment Manager initially. This may include: having early conversations, pre- request, assisting community groups in capacity building, clarifying how the community group might contribute to the Outcome Improvement Plan, developing thinking around making a request, helping navigate the Council and which Services need to be involved. A particular focus will be on areas where social capital is low so that the empowerment of individuals and communities has the greatest positive impact.
 - Signposting community groups to assistance independent from the Council. There are a number of national and local organisations who can provide assistance and it is a matter for the community group to identify who it chooses to engage with. Third Sector, Dumfries and Galloway as the Third Sector Interface is funded by the Council to provide support to third sector organisations and would one of several sources of advice to community groups.

- Ensuring our Procedure and documentation is clear, easy to understand and access. We will work with the Plain English Campaign and elicit feedback from CPBs and website users. We will also provide documents in Plain Language, in the language required, on request.

Objective 3 - To ensure transparency and fairness in our decision-making

- The criteria that the Council will use to assess Participation Requests is detailed in the procedure and our response to Participation Requests will include information about why a Request has been accepted or rejected.
- There will be a Participation Request Forum established; involving all stakeholders which will look at the Requests on a quarterly basis and any recommendations for change to our arrangements will be reported to Elected Members in a public Committee for consideration.

Objective 4 - To respond positively to the improvements suggested through Participation Requests

- The creation of Outcome Improvement Plans by the responsible Directorates will be promoted as a positive contribution to making our services better. This work will be supported by the Communities Directorate
- The implementation of OIPs will be consistent with Council Human Resources policies and procedures and Council Budget decisions.
- The relevant Strategic Committee will receive information on the OIPs agreed so that Elected Members have oversight of the contributions being made by community groups to the services within their remit.

Monitoring the Strategy

- Communities Directorate Business Plan –a Project about the implementation of the Participation Requests Strategy and Procedure will be included in the Business Plan for 201/18; and therefore there will be six monthly reports to the Communities Committee.
- Annual Report - In line with the new legislation, an Annual Report will be prepared and submitted to Communities Committee, listing all Participation Request applications received and detailing the number which have been agreed and refused. The report will also provide information on how the use of Participation Requests has been promoted and the supported. Views of the Participation Request Forum about changes to the Strategy or Procedure will also be submitted as part of this report. We will be supported by the Equality and Diversity Working Group to look at request statistics in terms of inclusivity and will report findings and any proposed improvement plans to increase inclusion. These annual reports, covering 1 April to 31 March, will be published by 30 June each year. It will also report on action it has taken to promote the use of Participation Requests and to support CPBs to make requests. In line with Scottish Government requirements, the first annual report will be produced before 30 June 2018

7. Participation Request Forum

The Community Development and Empowerment Manager will convene a Forum comprising the Directorate Link Officers, Democratic and Legal Services, Third Sector D&G, a representative of the Equality and Diversity Working Group, Trades Unions and lead officers for other PSAs along with CPBs that have participated in the Council's process.

This Group will provide advice and guidance including good practice examples; monitor progress on the implementation of the Strategy and Procedure on a quarterly basis and develop recommendations for changes and improvements to our Council's arrangements. It will also assist in the preparation of the Annual Report.

8. Evaluating the impact of the Strategy

The monitoring of the number of Participation Requests in itself does not tell us what impact the Strategy has had on the empowerment of communities. There needs to be a dialogue with people who live in communities where Participation Requests have been progressed – those that were successful, and also where they have not succeeded, if there are any in that position.

The Social Capital Index being developed by NHSD&G will assist in determining the impact of the Strategy but in addition, there are evaluation tools which can be applied. This is an area of work in development at both national and local levels and it would be appropriate for the Annual Report to make reference to this.

The Participation Requests Forum – detailed in the Procedure – will have a role in assessing the impact of the Strategy and the involvement of CPBs, partners and Trades Unions will ensure that all interests are able to contribute to the assessment and identify improvements.

8. Working in Partnership

Other local Public Service Authorities are also subject to these requirements and are therefore also currently developing their approach to Participation Requests. The Council is working with Community Planning Executive Group to adopt, so far as possible, a consistent approach to handling Participation Requests to make it easier for communities. Partners have identified a named link person to work with the Council on requests to more than one Public Service Authority.

Strategies and Plans that link to the Participation Request Strategy

Dumfries and Galloway Community Learning and Development Partners' Strategic Plan 2015-18– Outcome 4 – Communities and target groups have developed increased capacity to plan and deliver solutions that best meet their needs

Dumfries and Galloway Council Community Participation and Engagement Strategy
<http://egenda.dumgal.gov.uk/aksdumgal/users/public/admin/kab12.pl?cmte=MUN&meet=6&arc=71>

Dumfries and Galloway Council Community Asset Transfer Strategy
<http://egenda.dumgal.gov.uk/aksdumgal/users/public/admin/kab12.pl?cmte=MUN&meet=6&arc=71>

Dumfries and Galloway Council Digital and ICT Strategy
<http://egenda.dumgal.gov.uk/aksdumgal/users/public/admin/kab12.pl?cmte=PRC&meet=46&arc=71>

Dumfries and Galloway Council Volunteering Strategy
<http://egenda.dumgal.gov.uk/aksdumgal/users/public/admin/kab12.pl?cmte=MUN&meet=6&arc=71>

Participation Requests Strategy Action Plan

Annex 2

Action	Link to Objective(s)	timescale	lead
Publish new Procedure and updated PR Application Forms	2, 3 and 4	by 30 September 2017	CDEM
Publish online all Forms and guidance	1, 2 ,3 and 4	by 30 September 2017	CDEM
Training for Ward Officers and Directorate link officers in the Procedure	2 and 4	by 31 October 2017	CDEM
Establish the Participation Requests Forum	1, 2, 3 and 4	by 31 October 2017	CDEM/All Directorates
Review our Strategy and Procedure	1, 2, 3 and 4	by April 2018	Participation Requests Forum
Annual Report on Participation Requests	1 and 3	by 30 June 2018	CPEM

CDEM – Community Development and Empowerment Manager

CPEM – Community Planning and Engagement Manager