

DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY COUNCIL

PARTICIPATION REQUESTS ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This is the Council's 2023/24 Participation Requests (PR) Annual Report.
- 1.2 The delivery has again been built on our PR Strategy which adds to a range of strategies which empower local people to be more engaged with our Council.
- 1.3 The community is made aware of Participation Requests through information from Ward Officers and the Council's Participation Request web pages. Though we have received only one formal application during the reporting period, the Council listens to communities and works with them to co-produce services to local communities. For example, post-Covid, the Council continues to work alongside the Community Food Providers around food provision to vulnerable people in our communities, with Community Resilience groups with community led Place Plans and Community Asset Transfer. We are also pleased to receive some EOIs for Participation Requests and one of these EOIs during the reporting period developed into a further PR.
- 1.4 The fact that we proactively manage requests to engage through discussion with groups 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 as things currently stand.
We continue to be very involved with the Scottish Government's review of Participation Request policy and are working on an expert witness group with SCDC on this review. The review is likely to include strengthening the Guidance and looking at potential Appeal arrangements and mechanisms. DGC has been fully involved with SCDC and community groups across Scotland in discussions around what arrangements might be considered as effective in terms of community empowerment. When the Scottish Government Guidance is reviewed, Dumfries and Galloway Council will review its Policy and Procedures to reflect these national outcomes.

2. Legislative Requirements

- 2.1 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:
- 2.2 Promotion of Participation Requests- anything the relevant authority has done to promote the use of participation requests and support Community Participation Bodies to make requests.
- 2.3 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

3.1 The Council agreed its Participation Request Strategy and Procedure in 2017.

Promotion of Participation Requests and support to community bodies to make participation requests was considered key to the Strategy.

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. There are many examples of communities co-producing services across our council, from community led town centre regeneration in the main towns of Dumfries and Stranraer to the design of anti-poverty services led by people with lived experience of poverty. Dumfries and Galloway have also a very high number of Community Asset Transfers, around 100 if shorter leases are included, where the Council works with local Trusts and other community bodies to support local needs and help communities take forward their local plans and ambitions.

3.3 The PR Strategy says that the Council is already very proactive about community engagement and empowerment and has many ways for communities to be heard, including the Community Participation and Engagement Strategy. Within the strategy PR is seen as one mechanism for engagement with the Council. Recognising that it is important that communities have a range of ways to engage, we promote PR as an approach communities may wish to take.

3.4 Listening to community groups and stakeholders, consultation with community groups and benchmarking with other Councils, Elected Members and officers shaped the Strategy and Procedure to address the following issues:

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

Community Empowerment is an important aspect of our Council’s Plan and “Support our communities” is one of the key principles. This is defined as being about:- Empowering Communities with the commitment to;

- Work in Partnership
- Focus on local and Place
- Invest to Enable Change

4. Support for Community Groups

4.1 We continue to implement the PR Strategy action plan, which includes:

- 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
- 4.2 All documentation for PR 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 Participation Request.
- 4.3 The PR webpage 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, but Groups may also 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.
- 4.4 Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway was actively involved in developing the Council's Strategy and Procedure and promotes PR to community groups.
- 4.5 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.
- 4.6 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.
- 4.7 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 received and those agreed/ refused

5.1 Participation Requests Received 1

- 5.1.1 During the reporting period, the Council received one Participation Request from Loreburn Community Council. This request was agreed by the Director Communities and by Loreburn Community Council and thereafter the Outcome Improvement was detailed on the Council's Participation Request Webpages.

5.2 Participation Requests Refused- 0