

DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY COUNCIL

PARTICIPATION REQUESTS ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This is our Council's fourth Participation Requests Annual Report which details the proactive approach undertaken to promote the availability of this community empowerment facility.
- 1.2 The fourth year of delivery has been built on our PR Strategy which is about empowering local people to be more engaged with our Council.
- 1.3 The community is made aware of Participation Requests although we have not received many formal applications. Over this reporting period, Covid has involved our community groups in working with their communities and Community Planning Partners on emergency response and Participation Requests has not perhaps been at the forefront of their considerations. Many community groups have participated very actively with the Council over the last year e.g. in terms of coproduced community food provision to vulnerable people and community resilience activities, including volunteering. We are also however, pleased to have received some expressions of interest in Participation Requests as this demonstrates awareness of its availability.
- 1.4 The fact that we proactively manage these 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.

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 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. 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.

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 "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 approaches will be the exception rather than the rule". 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

The Council agreed 4 objectives for PR which are both about promotion of opportunity 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 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
- Documentation that is clear and easy to access

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 In developing our Procedure, 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 on the PR 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.

4.4. 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, 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.

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

4.6 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.

4.7 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 received and those agreed/ refused

5.1 Participation Request Agreed- 1

5.1.1 As reported in the 2019/20 Annual Report, , the Council accepted a Participation Request on 12 March 2020. The Council proposed that the Outcome Improvement Process for the Community Participation Body (CPB) the Echo Steering Group was 'to have a place on the Dumfries and Galloway Participation and Engagement Working Group (PEWG) and be a partner in the process of improving outcomes for bottom- up engagement, sharing the journey with the Council and its partners'. The PEWG is the vehicle used by the Council to improve its public engagement.

5.1.2 Under normal circumstances the CPB would have had 28 days to respond and or make representation to the Outcome Improvement Plan (OIP). However, due to the response to the COVID-19 Pandemic an extension to this timescale was requested by the CPB and was agreed by our Council.

5.1.3 Representation about the Outcome Improvement Plan was received on 29 June 2020 and therefore within the reporting period of this Annual Report. After taking into account the representation, the original OIP was confirmed to the CPB on 13 July 2020 and they were added to the membership of the PEWG.

5.1.4 The OIP is detailed fully on the Council's PR webpage.

https://dumgal.gov.uk/media/22733/Participation-Request-Decision-Notice-TheEcho/pdf/Participation_Request_-_The_Echo.pdf?m=637200346937000000

5.1.5 Contact has been ongoing with the Echo - they participate in conveying their views via the Participation and Engagement Working Group.

5.2 Participation Requests Refused- 0

5.3 Other discussions

Within the reporting period, the Council had discussion with one group which subsequently decided that it did not wish to pursue a Participation Request but to have a discussion around the work of the Tackling Poverty Reference Group which is led by people with lived experience of poverty. The group is now in active discussion with the Tackling Poverty Reference Group.