



## Participation Requests Reporting Template 2021/22 for Public Service Authorities

Section 32 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 requires public service authorities to produce an annual report on Participation Request activity and publish this no later than 30 June each year. This template has been created to gather participation request data for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. Information provided will help inform policy and practice at local and national level as the data will be collated and shared by the Scottish Government's Community Empowerment Team. However, it is for each public service authority to make their own annual report publicly available by 30 June 2022, whether using this template or not.

Please provide information in the sections below and email the completed template by 30 June 2022 to [community.empowerment@gov.scot](mailto:community.empowerment@gov.scot).

### **Section One – Public Service Authority Information**

Organisation:

Scottish Borders Council

Completed by: Clare Malster                      Role: Participation Officer

Email: [cmalster@scotborders.gov.uk](mailto:cmalster@scotborders.gov.uk) Telephone: 01835 826626

Date of completion: 22 June 2022

Are you the Participation Request Lead Contact for the organisation: Yes

If not please provide the name, job title and email address for the lead contact for any queries:

**Section 2: Participation Request Data for 2021/22**

Please complete following overview table:

Total new applications received in 2021/22	Total applications received prior to 1 April 2020 which were still to be determined at 1 April 2021	Number of accepted applications in 2021/22	Number of applications agreed in 2021/22	Number of applications refused in 2021/22
1	0	0	0	0

2.1 Please provide details of Participation Requests received using the legislation and outwith the legislation in 2021/22 which resulted in changes to public services provided by or on behalf of your public service authority and tell us about those changes:

Name of Community Participation Body	Was the Participation Request successful? (Y/N)	Previous way of working	Way of working following changes	What difference did those changes make for the users of the service? Did they improve service user experiences or outcomes?	Details of any participation requests considered outwith the formal process e.g. agreements reached that resulted in changes to services.

**2.2 Please use this space to provide any further comments relating to the above data, such as describing the outcome improvement process (whether or not it resulted from a formal participation request) and how the community participation body was involved in it, or details of any wider benefits, such as improved community engagement and ongoing participation.**

One application was received during 2021/22 although wasn't validated that year as further information was required.

### **Section Three – Partnership Working & Promotion of Participation Requests**

**3.1 Please provide details of any engagement with support organisations such as local Third Sector Interfaces and public sector Community Learning and Development staff or national organisations such as the Scottish Community Development Centre.**

***For example has any new practices to support Participation Requests been developed from working with other bodies, or any learning gained?***

Scottish Borders Council (SBC) continues to review processes for public involvement following work undertaken with SCDC prior to the pandemic. Participation request and asset transfer updates feature on the agendas of all our Area Partnership meetings.

One of the recommendations in the SCDC report was that communities are more involved in making decisions on applications to SBC's Community Fund. In consultation with working groups established in each of the five localities, community led assessment panels were established. The Assessment Panels were in place for the opening of the 2021/22 Community Fund. The Panels assess grant applications and make funding recommendations to the relevant Area Partnership. Due to the existing Scheme of Administration it hasn't been possible to devolve the decision making to the Panels although work is currently being undertaken to explore this.

Five new posts have been created providing a Community Engagement Officers in each of the five localities in the region. Along with a Greenspace Programme Officer, a Climate Change Officer and two Place Planning & Regeneration Officers the capacity to provide support to communities has increased. This is reflected in an increase in the number of groups working alongside SBC to improve things in their area. Although none of this work has been taken forward under a formal Participation Request we are seeing some very positive outcomes coming through. We believe that while participation requests provide a good process for groups to engage in they are not necessary in instigating community involvement in the ways things are delivered. If anything the formality of the process may put some groups off as well as removing the organic way in which some of this work has developed. A good example of this is work that has been taking place with the catering team and pupils at Peebles High School.

Pupils at Peebles High School wanted healthy eating options to be available throughout the year and to include hot meals rather than just salads. Working closely with the catering team they have identified ways in which the menu could be developed to ensure that a range of options is available. This work, started in 2021/22, is ongoing and will be reported on further once it has concluded.

The way in which we work with communities changed during the pandemic in order to ensure that we responded quickly and effectively to the range of needs/situations as they arose. Building on this we have seen the way in which the Winter Hardship Fund was allocated last year. Using feedback and lived experience we had conversations with colleagues across the public, third and community sectors to ensure that funding was used to address identified issues across our communities. Working together we provided financial support to existing projects/initiatives (FareShare and Foodbanks) but also developed ideas to work more proactively. The Low & Slow project in the Burnfoot area of Hawick saw all three sectors working together to provide slow cookers, recipes, food and support where required. Rather than just providing food it provided a low cost way in which to prepare meals - essential as energy costs continue to rise. Following its success this is now being rolled out to other areas in the Borders.

The work that took place following the SCDC report has helped when developing our processes for Place Making. The lead in some localities has been taken on by the community with the local authority very much in a supporting, rather than leading, role. Our communities have been very clear in how they see Place Plans being developed and are proposing ways to do this in the localities that they know and understand to ensure that it is right for them and that it is not a 'one size fits all' approach.

This very much reflects the ethos of the Act and one of Scottish Borders Council's priorities: Support and empower people to achieve strong, active, resilient and sustainable communities and realise opportunities for improving people's lives. As well as the National Outcome: We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe.

### **3.2 Please provide details of action taken to promote the use of Participation Requests or support Community Participation Bodies in making a Participation Request.**

***For example this could include: Support before making a request, such as to determine whether a participation request is the most appropriate route; - Support to make the request such as assist groups to complete forms, or identify appropriate outcomes; and/or Support to take part effectively in outcome improvement processes (whether or not they resulted from a formal participation request).***

Support is provided by our Community Engagement Officers as outlined above, whether it is through developing formal participation requests or working collaboratively with groups/organisations (outwith the Act) to achieve agreed outcomes.

We work closely with our TSI who support groups to develop requests

We provide support and advice to groups who wish to develop and submit participation requests. Particularly in identifying what it is they wish to achieve and how it will improve outcomes within their communities, which may be more than they had initially envisaged.

We provide information to our locality based Area Partnership meetings. A presentation, featuring examples of participation requests previously received, was given at Cheviot Area Partnership.

### **3.3 Please let us know what actions you have been taking to ensure that your processes are inclusive.**

***For example, this could include accessible information and other support, which enable wider use of participation requests by all population groups including those with protected characteristics.***

Our Community Engagement Officers are linked into a wide variety of groups in their localities. Through these conversations groups are supported to submit requests. These conversations have resulted in community involvement and outcome improvement processes (outwith the Act) being established.

**3.4 Please outline any plans you have to continue involving local people and local groups in outcome improvement processes as a result of your Participation Request policies (and also outwith formal participation requests).**

We are currently reviewing our processes and will be involving community participation bodies in this work in order to learn from their experiences.

The community based Place Making Working Groups as detailed above were formed following an informal request for the community to take on the lead role in Place Making in order to ensure that everything about the process is bottom up.

**3.5 Please provide details about any work undertaken to consider wider reviews of participation practice, and any such methods used to engage with communities**

The creation of nine new permanent posts (five Community Engagement Officers, two Place Planning & Regeneration Officers, a Greenspace Programme Officer and Climate Change Officer) during 2021/22 reflects Scottish Borders Council's commitment to engaging with our communities and taking forward Scottish Government policies including Community Empowerment, Participatory Budgeting, Place Making and Net Zero.

Officers are supporting community led groups to shape Place Making in their areas and advise Area Partnerships on how things will be taken forward in their locality – very much ensuring that the whole process, not just development of the Plans, is bottom up.

Building on our experiences during Covid we are enabling communities to take the lead on work such as Funding Assessment Panels and Place Making. To support them in this they are able to request help from the Council when required, rather than the other way round, aware that the local authority should not be the lead partner in everything.

We commenced a refresh of our Community Engagement Strategy in March 2021. In this work we have spoken to internal and external stakeholders, including the general public, in order to ensure that their voices are reflected in the refreshed strategy. The strategy will also build on our learning from Covid and the ways in which we engaged with our communities as well as taking account of new digital technologies whilst being mindful that not everyone is able/wishes to engage with us in that way.

#### **Section Four – Additional Information**

**4.1 Please use this space to provide any further feedback not covered in the above sections.**

***For example, we are interested in your reflections about what has gone well and what has gone less well in relation to Participation Requests over the past year?***

***Is there any aspect of the process that you intend to adapt or change in the year ahead?***

As set out in 3.4 and 3.5 we are reviewing our processes relating to the Community Empowerment Act as well as wider community engagement.

***Have you identified any needs for guidance or support that would support the process?***

Opportunities to share experience and good practice with other Public Service Authorities would be welcomed. Something similar to the Community Council Liaison Officer's Group, supported by Government Officers, would be great.

***If you have developed any case study material or published new information about Participation Requests please share links to those with us here.***

*Any other information:*

## **Section Five – Community Empowerment Act Review**

*The following questions relate to the Scottish Government review of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. We would value your feedback as a public service authority concerned with part 3 (participation requests) of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.*

5.1 Has the legislation made things easier or more difficult to access? Please provide some comments on your experiences as a public service authority engaging with this legislation.

The legislation doesn't replace the need for engaging with communities at grass roots level. As previously stated not all joint working to improve outcomes for a community takes place under the legislation. However, it is acknowledged that there will be some instances whereby the legislation has facilitated a level of involvement that may not have happened otherwise.

It is appreciated that timescales set out in the legislation can be extended by mutual agreement.

5.2 Where can things be further improved, and what needs to change?

Legislation is complex and can be difficult for the public to work with even with support from council officers. There is user friendly information available but a knowledge of where to look for it is needed. It would be helpful if links to information, such as that provided by SCDC, were available on the Scottish Government's website.

5.3 Are you aware of what support is available to you when engaging with this legislation, and how you can access this? Please provide comments where possible.

Government Officers are always very helpful although we are not aware of an independent organisation that is available to provide advice to both community participation bodies and public service authorities in the same way that the Community Ownership Support Service does in relation to Asset Transfer Requests.

5.4 What would you like to see now, to further empower Scotland's communities?

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Date of completion:

**Please email the completed template by 30 June 2022 to [community.empowerment@gov.scot](mailto:community.empowerment@gov.scot)**

If you have any queries please contact Malcolm Cowie, Participation Request Policy Manager at [Malcolm.cowie@gov.scot](mailto:Malcolm.cowie@gov.scot)

Thank you!

Community Empowerment Team, Scottish Government