

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 four sections below and email the completed template by 30 June 2022 to community.empowerment@gov.scot.

Section One – Public Service Authority Information

Organisation: West Lothian Council

Address: Civic Centre, Livingston, EH54 6FF

Completed by: Susan Gordon

Role: Community Planning Development Officer

Email: susan.gordon@westlothian.gov.uk

Telephone: 07827983978

Date of completion: 22/08/2022

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 2021 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	1

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.
N/A					

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.

West Lothian Council received a Participation Request from the Joint Forum of Community Councils Environment Forum in September 2021. West Lothian Joint Forum of Community Councils is the umbrella organisation for community councils in the area. The request sought to improve the ability of the community to participate in and influence discussions around changes to waste services and increase the amount of waste being recycled through better communication and raising awareness of the importance of recycling within communities. The initial panel meeting met to consider the eligibility of the request and concluded that further advice from legal services should be sought regarding the eligibility of the Environment Forum to make a request. Further information was also sought from the Joint Forum itself. The Environment Forum is an unconstituted part of the Joint Forum, and the Joint Forum is a body whose Terms of Reference do not allow them to submit a valid participation request. The Joint Forum are a body who represent community councils – who directly represent their communities, but the Forum itself does not directly represent communities.

Based on legal advice, and for the reasons outlined above, the panel concluded that the applicants were not a community participation body and so were not entitled to make a participation request. For that reason, the application was not judged against the assessment criteria.

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?

The Participation Request toolkit was refreshed following feedback from local groups back in 2020, however further work to review has been delayed due to COVID-19. The intention is to revisit the toolkit and supporting materials to ensure they are still fit for purpose.

Both new and existing elected members have been briefed on participation and community empowerment processes, including participation requests.

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).

There is a clear process in place for making a participation request to the council, with all information and support materials contained on a dedicated page on the council's website (including the application form and detailed guidance notes, Frequently Asked Questions, Toolkit). Materials have also been shared widely with local community organisations. There is a designated point of contact for participation requests (the council's Community Planning Development Officer), who support community organisations from initial discussion on potential requests, to developing application forms and through the decision-making and outcome improvement processes.

The approach we have taken in West Lothian is that groups are encouraged to engage with officers prior to submitting a formal request in order to identify if there are any existing mechanisms in place they can participate in linked to the issue/proposal that they are seeking to address in the participation request.

Since the council's participation request process was first implemented in 2017, there have been a number of community sessions delivered to raise awareness of participation requests as well as other parts of the Community Empowerment Act, many delivered in partnership with the local Third Sector Interface (Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian). There were no new community sessions held in 2021/22 - mainly due to restrictions as a result to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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.

The council has used feedback from the SCDC sessions in 2020 to review and refresh the Toolkit and other materials to ensure that these are accessible and user-friendly. Work will be undertaken to further review the toolkit and supporting materials, and shared widely with local community groups to further promote the process. This will include ensuring the toolkit and any other support will reach protected characteristic groups and other 'hard to reach' groups including equality forums and regeneration steering groups. We will also work with the Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian and other local networks to help promote the materials.

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).

Any outcome improvement process developed as a result of a participation request will be developed in consultation with the community group submitting the request.

The council's process encourages community groups to engage in early discussion with council officers on potential requests. This will help to ensure that any applications submitted are appropriate, robust and well thought out and allows discussion on what an outcome improvement process may look like.

More widely, the council also continues to engage with and involve communities through other participation mechanisms, for example via the local regeneration steering groups, the Joint Forum of Community Councils in West Lothian and community councils, community equality forums, MSYPs, tenant participation mechanisms, the Anti-Poverty Strategy's Experts by Experience Panel.

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 Council continues to ensure that we work in partnership with communities and that their voices help to shape policy and services in West Lothian. There have been challenges with engaging communities over the last 2 years, and going forward it will be important to ensure that a range of participation opportunities are available for local people to participate at the level they want.

Regeneration Plans are being refreshed in conjunction with West Lothians Local Outcome Improvement Plan, and engagement is being carried out in local regeneration areas. Local regeneration steering groups provide an opportunity for local individuals and organisations to be involved. The council also continues to meet with the Joint Forum of Community Councils in West Lothian and discussion topics include the council's participation and engagement activity.

The community engagement toolkit has been reviewed and will be used as a local resource to raise awareness of and improve engagement practice.

West Lothian Councils Community Choices process is also being developed.

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?

Given that there was only one request submitted, and that it wasn't taken forward, there are no new reflections on the process itself.

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

The council is committed to undertaking regular reviews of the participation request process to reflect on learning from requests received, in order to ensure the process remains fit for purpose. Given that engagement through COVID-19 has been limited, work around promotion and awareness raising will be taken forward.

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

More promotion of participation requests at a national level may help to raise awareness of the approach within the community. Promoting other participation and involvement opportunities is also important as well as that early engagement.

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 provides a formal route for participation but doesn't replace other engagement mechanisms. It is a useful tool to support participation and engagement.

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

Sharing good practice examples (for the benefit of both local groups and the council/other organisations) would be beneficial.

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.

The Scottish Governments Community Empowerment Team has been accessed.

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

Continued awareness raising and promotion of the legislation in communities and for officers.

Completed by: Susan Gordon

Role: Community Planning Development Officer

Email: susan.gordon@westlothian.gov.uk Tel: 07827983978

Date of completion: 22.08.2022

Subject to the pressures of responding to the Covid-19 emergency situation and recovery – if possible please email the completed template by 30 June 2022 to community.empowerment@gov.scot

If you have any queries please contact Malcolm Cowie, Participation Request Policy Manager at Malcolm.cowie@gov.scot

Thank you!

Community Empowerment Team, Scottish Government