

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION REQUESTS
ANNUAL REPORT 2018/1

Purpose of Report

1. To provide a report on community participation request activity in East Ayrshire during 2018/19.

Background

2. In accordance with the terms of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, each public service authority is required to publish an annual report which sets out how many participation requests they received, and the number agreed to and refused, over the reporting year. The nature of each request, and any subsequent outcome improvement process, also require to be published. The annual report must also outline any action taken by the authority to promote the use of participation requests and to support community participation bodies in the making of requests.
3. Annual Reports for the reporting year to 31 March require to be published by 30 June each year. This report relates to the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019.

Participation Requests Received

4. During the reporting period, **no** community participation requests were received by East Ayrshire Council. Consultation with community planning partners also indicates that no such requests relating to East Ayrshire have been received by them.
5. Aware that no participation requests had been received by the end of March 2019, officers within the Council's Vibrant service undertook a desktop review of the activity which had been undertaken by the Council and its community planning partners to make communities aware of participation requests. The aim of this exercise was to give assurance that sufficient awareness raising had been undertaken, to ensure that communities were aware of both participation requests and the wider community empowerment agenda. The outcome of this review is presented below.

Activity to Promote the Use of Participation Requests

6. When participation requests were introduced, East Ayrshire already had in place a range of effective and well established structures to facilitate community engagement, including community led action plan steering groups, community councils and tenants and residents' associations. However participation requests offered an additional route for communities to become involved in local decision making processes, and early activity took place to ensure that these new procedures were effectively implemented in East Ayrshire.

7. Participation requests were introduced with effect from 1 April 2017. In advance of this date, officers within Vibrant Communities and the Policy, Planning and Performance Division worked together to develop a participation requests procedure for East Ayrshire Council, a copy of which is attached as Appendix 1 of this report. Training was also provided to partnership staff in relation to community engagement, within the context of the Community Empowerment legislation, including participation requests.
8. Public Information on how to make a participation requests was and continues to be hosted centrally on the [community planning partnership website](#) – visitors to the Council’s website were signposted to this page via the Vibrant Communities pages and partner agencies also made their own arrangements to publicise participation requests through their websites and networks. In addition a poster and flier were prepared and circulated to partners. Community facing staff across Vibrant Communities ensured, and continue to ensure, that these publicity materials were displayed and made available in public council buildings across the authority area. Both the publicity materials and the website include a contact telephone number, to encourage interested parties to get in touch with Vibrant Communities for support in relation to making a participation request.
9. Vibrant Communities staff, through existing community led action plan steering groups, community councils and other local networks, continue as a part of their routine business to raise awareness of community empowerment and, in particular, participation requests. Events, such as the annual Community Planning Conference, are routinely used to display the participation requests publicity materials and to engage with community sector representatives in this regard. This activity has been ongoing over the course of 2018/19.
10. During 2018, one year on from the launch of participation requests, a fresh run of fliers and posters was made and circulated, once again, through the Vibrant Communities network across East Ayrshire, to ensure that this information remained accessible to local communities.

Conclusion

11. Although no participation requests have as yet been received in East Ayrshire, significant activity continues to be undertaken to make communities aware of this additional community empowerment mechanism. Participation Requests were not, however, intended to replace good quality existing community engagement or participation processes, rather they were introduced to provide an alternative route for community bodies who were unable to engage with public bodies to influence local outcomes through other, existing routes.
12. While not complacent in this regard, we believe that communities across East Ayrshire are already actively engaged with the Council and its community planning partners. We have in place a strong network of Community Led Action Plan Steering Groups and Community Councils; and Vibrant Communities staff continue to work closely with communities across the authority area. Additionally, the Transformation Team have used the Vibrant Voices approach to community engagement which has

generated a broad range of feedback over a range of subjects including budget options, service delivery and future priorities for East Ayrshire Council. This approach has led to enhanced engagement with in excess of 3,500 responses received for the conversation on budgeting. To ensure the widest reach possible, a range of engagement methods were used. These included 'pop-up' sessions at public events and an online questionnaire which was available on the Council's website. People were invited to join a Vibrant Voices conversation on social media. This style of "always on" engagement may be a key reason why no participation requests have been received to date.

13. We will continue to make communities aware of participation requests as one of the many community empowerment mechanisms which are in place in East Ayrshire; and will continue to monitor the level of interest in participation requests over 2019/20. Lead responsibility for participation requests within the Council continues to sit with Vibrant Communities.

25 June 2019

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL PARTICIPATION REQUESTS PROCESS

