

Review of Participation Requests Annual Reports: Summary

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Introduction

This briefing is the first output of an 18-month evaluation of the implementation of Participation Requests (PRs) commissioned by the Scottish Government and being conducted by researchers at Glasgow Caledonian University. It summarises PR activity across Scotland using the data from the first set of annual reports that all Public Service Authorities (PSAs) referred to in the Act were required to publish by 30th June 2018 and covering the period 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018.

Part 3 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 (the Act) introduces the right for Participation Requests (PRs) which offer an opportunity for increased community engagement and dialogue between community participation bodies and Public Service Authorities (PSAs). The guidance document published for PSAs and communities¹ (Scottish Government, 2017) states that the intention of the Act is to 'enable the active participation of communities in addressing the issues and opportunities which are of the greatest importance to them' (2017: 6).

Key findings

As at 31st July, not all PSAs submitted an annual report, with some due to be published at a later date. The type, format, amount and quality of data within the reports also varied considerably. Combined with a low level of identified PR activity at this stage, there is a limit to the conclusions that can be drawn about how PRs are operating. In particular, it is not possible to comment on any general themes relating to the way in which PRs are being used or why or by whom.

- From the reports that were submitted there were 19 PR applications, 12 of which were accepted and 6 refused. The majority of these were received by local authorities (18 out of 19).
- Despite the novelty of the legislation and early stages of the implementation of Part 3 of the Act three PSAs reported positive changes to their services as a result of the PR:

PSA	Change in public service
Argyll and Bute Council	'Agreement between the Council and Helensburgh CC in place which ensures that better communication in relation to roads issues will be available via the Council's website and specific members of the CC will be added to the list of recipients for emails regarding Road closures and Press releases.'
Clackmannanshire Council	'Action taken to improve the external appearance of the private property has resulted in improvements to the community environment.'
Police Scotland	'We have to date strengthened channels of communication with Cambuslang Community Council and Police Scotland's Cambuslang Management Team. We have ensured police visibility at Community Council Meetings which has also increased accessibility to local officers within the wider community of Cambuslang. We are currently still working with Cambuslang Community Council to continue to deliver on the outcomes within the improvement process.'

¹ <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/community-empowerment-participation-request-guidance/Participation%20requests%20-%20guidance.pdf?inline=true>

- PSAs are promoting and supporting the use of PRs through their websites, information events and through the designation of a first point of contact. PSAs highlighted briefings, training and workshops that had been undertaken to promote PRs within their organisations and ensure that there was organisational capacity to support communities with applications. Co-hosting events with third sector agencies and presenting at community planning events was a common promotion activity.
- Very few PSAs made reference to the ways in which support and promotion has been tailored for marginalised group, although the guidance document for PSAs includes suggestions for specific groups with protected characteristics and ‘disadvantaged and marginalised’ groups more broadly.
- Many of the reports acknowledged, as stated within the Scottish Government guidance on Part 3 of the Act, that PRs should not replace existing participation and engagement processes. The level of stated continued activity in other areas of community participation and engagement across many of the PSAs suggests a good understanding and implementation of the Act.

Next steps

Over the coming months Glasgow Caledonian University researchers will be conducting case studies in 6 PSAs in order to address the following research questions:

1. Whether, how, and to what extent, is Part 3 of the Act being implemented as intended in the legislation and guidance?
2. To what extent does implementation of Part 3 of the Act improve community–Public Authority engagement, dialogue and relationships, and with what potential contribution to improved public services?
3. What is the pattern of take up and use of Part 3 of the Act among different community groups? What are the potential implications of these patterns for local inequalities of outcomes?
4. Whether, how, and to what extent do communities feel more empowered as a result of the availability, take up and use of Part 3 of the Act?

The equalities implications of the lack of reference to ‘disadvantaged and marginalised’ groups within annual reports will be followed up in more detail.

A second review of annual reports will take place in 2019 and it is suggested that, in order to ensure a full submission of these reports, it would be useful for there to be a series of reminders for PSAs, alongside specific support activities. Further guidance that specifies in more detail the type, quality and format of the information to be presented in future reports would help to increase their usefulness in understanding how PRs are being implemented and used.