Review of Participation Requests Annual Reports: Summary

Clementine Hill O'Connor and Artur Steiner
September 2019

Introduction

This briefing is the second 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 annual reporting that all Public Service Authorities (PSAs) referred to in Part 3 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 (the Act) were required to publish by 30th June 2019 and covering the period 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019. In addition to the collection of annual reporting data, the documents related to PRs were searched for on PSA websites. Relevant documents included application forms and, in some cases, the outcome improvement process reports that outline any changes that have occurred as a result of the PRs. Accessing this information has allowed for analysis of the types of organisations that are submitting requests, the purpose of the request and the nature of any changes that may have occurred.

Part 3 of the Act introduces the right for Participation Requests (PRs) which offer an opportunity for increased community engagement and dialogue between community participation bodies (CPB) and Public Service Authorities (PSAs). The guidance document published for PSAs and communities[1] (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 23rd August 2019, annual reporting information was not readily available for all PSAs, and the data varied in type, format and quality. The level of missing data and inconsistency in reporting means that there are limits to the conclusions that can be drawn at this stage.
- Within the reports that were published there were 27 PR applications, 15 of which were accepted, eight refused and four were deemed invalid[2]. This indicates an increase in activity from 17/18 reporting period, though this should be interpreted with caution
- From the information found, local authorities received all 27 PRs in the most recent reporting period. This reflects data from the 17/18 annual reports in which the majority (18 out of 19) of PRs were also submitted to local authorities.
- Two PSAs reported changes to their services as a result of the PR. For the other PRs reported, the outcome improvement processes are ongoing. The table below outlines the reported changes in public service:

PSA	Purpose of Request	Change in public service
Orkney Islands Council	Related to health and safety of pedestrians and improved safety for vehicle manoeuvring at Rapness Pier	Addition of gates for pedestrian and vehicle access. This was considered to provide a reasonable solution to all foreseen combinations of movements of vehicles and pedestrians.
Perth and Kinross Council	To be involved in discussions to improve the local Community Hall	Officers met with representatives of the Hall Committee and agreed to add in new storage facilities and improve disabled access to the Hall.

---

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

[2] The four invalid requests were not included in any of the subsequent analysis

- In the reporting period 18/19 there were 12 PRs submitted by community councils, four submitted by local charities, two by development trusts and one by a sports club. Data was missing for four of the PRs submitted in this period. From the available data from across the two reporting periods, this shows a tendency towards community councils as the most common form of CPB to submit PRs.
- The tendency for submission of PRs by community councils may have an impact on the extent to which PRs can address inequalities due to the lack of diversity within many community councils[3].
- From the available data, the most popular purpose in reporting period 18/19 was general infrastructure and service provision (n=5), this included requests to be involved in decision making about local events and local regeneration plans.
- PSAs continue to promote the use of PRs through websites and information events. A number of PSAs have also conducted both internal and external training sessions including one local authority which has developed an e-learning module.
- The Scottish Government PR Guidance (2017) highlights a range of activities that may be required to promote PRs to specific groups with protected characteristics and 'disadvantaged and marginalised groups' more broadly. However, there were very few references to these specific groups within the reports available.
- Many of the annual reports specifically highlighted the range of other participation and engagement processes that the PSA actively promotes. This is an acknowledgement of the guidance which states that PRs should not replace existing practices of participation.

Next steps

Over the coming months Glasgow Caledonian University researchers will be completing the analysis of the qualitative data that has been generated from interviews and participant observation with a number of case study PSAs and community groups across Scotland.

The final report will 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 final report will be published in early 2020 in order to inform the Scottish Government report to the Scottish Parliament on part 3 of the Act, a statutory obligation included within the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

---

[3] Paterson, A., Nelis, P. and Escobar, O. (2019) Strengthening Community Councils. What Works Scotland and Scottish Community Development Centre. Available at:
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5943c23a440243c1fa28585f/t/5cbec89df4e1fca95331a06f/1556007160957/Strengthening+Community+Councils+-+web.pdf