



From mountain to sea

# Aberdeenshire Council Participation Request Annual Report

June 2020



## 1 Introduction

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 (the Act) passed into law on 24 July 2015. The Act introduces a range of measures designed to support communities to engage with public bodies to improve outcomes. Part 3 of the Act, participation requests, came into effect on 1 April 2017.

The diversity of Aberdeenshire communities, both geographic and of interest, give Aberdeenshire its unique sense of place. The council, along with partners, is committed to engaging and involving communities to create opportunities for increased participation in decision making and the design and delivery of services within those communities.

Through its commitment in achieving its strategic priorities, it was agreed that the council will provide opportunities for groups and individuals to have a voice on how things are done and have the potential to play a greater role in their local community. Formal opportunities for individuals or communities to be involved in improving local outcomes include, but isn't limited to:

- Joining a community council to facilitate a wide range of activities which promote the well-being of local communities
- Joining a tenant or community association
- Joining or starting a community group to deliver services in local communities like maintaining and developing open spaces
- Taking part in a participatory budgeting exercise
- Participating through established youth participation arrangements
- Taking ownership of land or buildings when local communities could make better use of the asset
- Taking part in local meetings such as local ward forums to develop and influence; plans or decisions
- Becoming a member of the Aberdeenshire Citizens' panel
- Responding to an engagement or consultation exercise to give views
- Volunteering to take a lead on issues such as becoming a local snow warden or developing local resilience plans
- Making views known through other methods such as social media, formal feedback arrangements, frontline informal engagement or the petitions process.

Section 26 of the Act requires the Council to set out, in a published annual report, how it has promoted and supported participation requests, number of participation requests received and the outcomes of these requests.

This report gives an overview of Participation Request activity for Aberdeenshire Council for the period 1 April 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020.

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## 2 Participation Request Process

Participation Requests offer a mechanism for communities to have a more proactive role in having their voices heard in how services are planned and delivered. By making a Participation Request, community groups can start a dialogue with Aberdeenshire Council about issues that are important to them, which should help to improve outcomes through participating in an outcome improvement process.

An outcome improvement process is an agreement between the council and the community group to have a formal conversation or dialogue about how an outcome could be improved. As part of a dialogue there may be discussions about service design and delivery but the council will decide if there will be any changes to existing service delivery arrangements following the outcome improvement process. A participation request is ultimately a right to a conversation, not a guarantee of a change in how services are planned and delivered. For community bodies participation requests should bring a level of transparency and accountability to working with the Council.

The council has developed a process to enable community groups to develop and submit a Participation Request. A form for community groups to use is available on the council's website along with details of requests received, information about the decision regarding requests and the subsequent agreed Outcome Improvement Process.

Community groups are encouraged to discuss their requests informally with the local Area Manager prior to formally submitting the request. Area Managers' contact details are available on the council's [website](#).

Support to develop and complete a request or take part in a outcome improvement process is available through organisations such as Aberdeenshire Rural Partnerships, Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action and the council's Community Learning & Development Service or the Community Engagement and Equalities team.

## 3 Participation Requests Received and Outcomes

Aberdeenshire Council received one Participation Request from Mearns Community Council, and Stonehaven and District Community Council during the reporting period 2018/19. The agreed Outcome Improvement Process is available on the [Council Website](#) and includes a commitment for community representatives to be involved in developing strategy to support Community Empowerment and improve and encourage equitable participation in decision making around Participatory Budgeting (PB) policy.

From April 2012 to March 2020 action taken in Aberdeenshire to promote and support the use of participation requests included:

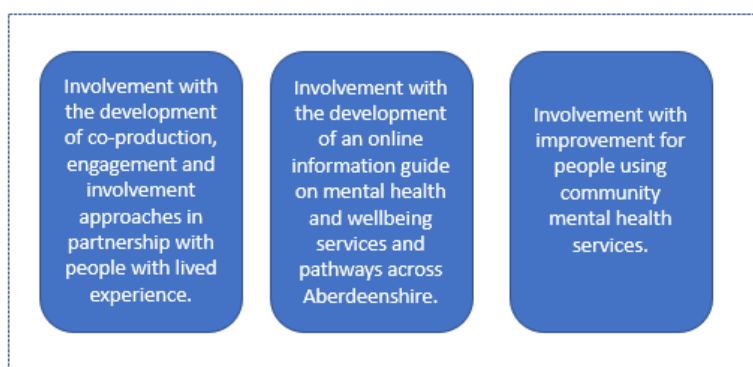
- Reviewing guidance on the Council website and promoting summary guidance in bulletins and newsletters and at events as appropriate;
- Providing a local contact for enquiries;
- Offering support to develop participation requests through established networks;
- Developing template documents and summary briefings

- Promoting the right to participate at events and forums with rural partnerships and community councils
- Promoting the duty associated with participation requests internally through publishing guidance and informal and formal meetings

For the period April 2019 to March 2020 Aberdeenshire Council received one participation request. One request was accepted, and zero requests were refused. The decision notice associated with the request received can be found on the Council [website](#).

The Participation Request received in 2019 was from Stonehaven District Community Council (SDCC). The Outcome Improvement Process has been agreed and involves Members of SDCC being co-opted on to mental health projects where there is a link to services within Stonehaven area. This involvement will give SDCC an opportunity to contribute to local mental health service development. SDCC members will have the opportunity to participate as highlighted in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Outcome Improvement Process with SDCC



The outcome improvement process highlighted in figure 1 will continue up until the end of 2021 when the overarching strategy will be reviewed, however work is currently paused at the moment in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Participation in the outcome improvement process will be monitored through review meetings taking place every 6 months between the AHSCP lead officer and SDCC representatives.

## 4 Monitoring and evaluation

To inform our future approaches to Participation Requests and help with continuous improvement we will evaluate activity through ongoing evaluation and review.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and a diverse range of appropriate methods may need to be used to ensure outcome improvement processes are meaningful. The Council will continue to assess the impact of processes and use what we have learned to improve future outcome improvement processes. For example, where appropriate we will assess to what extent:

- The outcomes intended are met.
  - Decisions which are taken reflect the views of participants
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- Local outcomes, or services, are improved as result of the process
- Participants have improved skills, confidence and ability to take part in other processes in the future
- Feedback is provided to the wider community on how the process has influenced decisions and what has changed as a result.

To help understand the wider impact of engagement and participation of members of the public and community groups we will continue to use the Aberdeenshire Council Reputation tracker and Citizens' Panel, to monitor the extent to which residents and communities think the council takes account of views and are involved in local decision making.