

Agenda Item	13.
Report No	CP/16/22

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 17 August 2022

Report Title: Community Participation and Involvement Update

Report By: Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 In recent years, one of the Council's core commitments has been to improve our working with communities and encourage greater involvement in service design, priority setting and delivery. This has been reflected in the Council's Localism approach and more recently the commitment to Place and agreement of the Place Based Framework in December 2021. This commitment also aligns to a number of duties set out in the Community Empowerment Act.
- 1.2 One of the duties contained within the Empowerment Act is the right of community bodies to submit a Participation Request. Participation requests allow a community body to talk with public authorities about local issues and services. Where a community body believes it could help to improve an outcome, it will be able to ask that public body to take part in a process to improve that outcome. As part of this duty, public bodies are required to submit an annual report to the Scottish Government. In recognition that the number of participation requests across Scotland remains very low, the annual report asks public bodies to report more generally on their activities to involve communities and encourage participation and engagement.
- 1.3 This report introduces the Annual Participation Request report to be submitted to the Scottish Government but also provides an update of the work taking place to increase and improve participation and involvement across Highland. The annual report includes proposed responses to a series of questions posed on the experience of participation requests to help inform the review of the Community Empowerment Act recently launched by the Scottish Government.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:

- Consider and note the update on the work ongoing to increase participation and involvement of communities in Council activity across Highland;
- Agree the Annual Participation Request report for the Scottish Government set out at Appendix 1.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource implications

There are no direct resource implications as a result of this report. The work outlined is planned and budgeted for.

3.2 Legal implications

The Council has a legal duty to meet the terms of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act. This includes duties to better empower and involve communities.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) implications

The Council has ongoing statutory duties to take account of the Public Sector Duty to consider eliminating discrimination, advancing equality and fostering good relations. Additionally, the Fairer Scotland Duty requires the Council to take socio-economic disadvantage into account when making strategic decisions.

3.4 One of the Council's Equality Outcomes includes a specific priority to improve engagement and involvement with individuals with protected characteristics. As we move forward, it is crucial that the engagement strategy considers how to include and embed the views of equality groups.

3.5 Climate Change implications

Community involvement in the response to Climate Change is crucial. Work on Climate Action Towns is a good example of promoting community participation and involvement to tackle climate change. The project works with local people and organisations in small towns across Scotland to empower and support communities to take place-based climate action. The Community Support Co-ordinators have also been working with a range of groups to support their ambitions which for many include projects related to addressing climate change and adaptation e.g. alternative uses of green space.

3.6 Gaelic implications

There are not considered to be any implications.

3.7 Risk implications

There are no risk implications identified in the report.

4. Background

4.1 In recent years, one of the Council's core commitments has been to improve our working with communities and encourage greater involvement in service design, priority setting and delivery. This has been reflected in the Council's Localism approach and

more recently the commitment to Place and agreement of the Place Based Framework in December 2021. This commitment also aligns to a number of duties set out in the Community Empowerment Act including Community Planning, Participatory Budgeting, Participation Requests and Community Asset Transfer.

- 4.2 One of the duties contained within the Empowerment Act is the right of community bodies to submit a Participation Request. Participation requests allow a community body to talk with public authorities that would result in an improvement to a specific area of service. Where a community body believes it could help to improve an outcome, it will be able to ask that public body to take part in a process to improve that outcome. Participation requests are not a replacement for consultation or other forms of engagement and nor are they a mechanism to change a decision that has already been made that a group may not agree with. It has been noted that should existing participation and involvement measures be working well, that participation requests should not be required.
- 4.3 As part of this duty, public bodies are required to submit an annual report to the Scottish Government. In recognition that the number of Participation Requests across Scotland remains very low, the annual report asks public bodies to report more generally on their activities to involve communities and encourage participation and engagement.
- 4.4 This report outlines a number of strands of work ongoing or planned to support or improve participation and involvement of communities in Council service design, delivery and priority setting. A further aim alongside this is to support groups to realise their aims and deliver against their own local priorities. These are summarised in the Annual Participation Request report to Scottish Government.
- 4.5 The final section of the report summarises key points from the Annual Report whilst also outlining the proposed response to questions posed as part of the Scottish Government's review of the Community Empowerment Act; with a specific focus here on learning from Participation Requests.

5. Improving Participation and Involvement

- 5.1 Over the last 12 months there has been a number of strands of work progressed to encourage greater participation and involvement from communities. These include:
- 5.2 **Rate your Estate** - During 2021 - 2022 the Highland Council Housing Tenant Participation Team carried out 11 Rate your Estate inspections at the request of Registered Tenant Groups. A Rate your Estate is where local tenants and residents join Council Officers, and quite often a local councillor, to jointly inspect their housing estate and prioritise areas for improvement.
- 5.3 **Community Development** - Area-based Community Support Coordinators were appointed in August 2021 and facilitated over 1600 interactions with community groups across Highland during their first six months' activity in this new role. Key aspects of the role include:

- supporting communities recovering from the pandemic
- co-ordinating and deliver humanitarian and resilience support
- building on community networks that emerged through the pandemic and building community capacity to deliver local priorities
- encouraging participation and involvement in Council priority setting, re-focusing partnership priorities and supporting place-based planning

The community role in service design, delivery and planning has never been more important at time when public sector services need to transform in order to meet the current financial challenges. Enabling sustainable communities capable of delivering local priorities is vital but support is required in the post covid world to take this forward and enable communities to contribute to key areas of development such as place planning.

From a community perspective, there is also a real opportunity to help build sustainable, capable and inclusive communities. Examples of work progressed include:

- Support for food – initial focus on delivery of food to those most vulnerable or self isolating plus wider role in promoting development of food larders/tables creating community-run sustainable local provision
- Volunteering – in response to emerging volunteering crisis in third sector organisations post pandemic. Recruiting and encouraging young people to volunteer and encouraging employers to permit employees to volunteer during work hours
- Mapping of local groups and services – understanding the network of groups including aims and objectives. Has led to making connections between groups, building capacity and enabling project development and delivery.
- Supporting Project development - signposting groups to available funding streams to enable project delivery, facilitating community groups to overcome barriers, making connections between groups to encourage joint work and local delivery.
- Supporting actions to tackle inequalities - assisting mental health and wellbeing groups to develop priority approaches. This supports the Community Partnership/Locality Plan priorities and to effectively meet need.
- Delivery of Council service priorities within budgetary constraints/reductions – play park development: supporting groups to assume responsibility and identify resources for repairing/replacing playpark equipment; supporting climate action town activity; supporting developing community food growing projects.

This groundwork in community development and review is fundamental to groups' underlying capacity to participate in other mechanisms for Place Planning and service improvement. The Community support Co-ordinators are in post until March 2023 to support this work.

5.4 Food Growing – A Community Food Growing Coordinator was appointed in August 2021 to engage with groups seeking to develop new responses to food poverty, food network resilience and climate adaptation. Approaches being developed at a local level continue to inform and shape wider delivery of this strategic priority through the

participation of ambitious groups with a vision for their local areas through discussion with council services. This has in particular involved participation of community bodies in review and planning for the future of amenity and open spaces. A green space mapping of resources has begun to bring about further demand and act as a catalyst for increased uptake of community food growing projects.

5.5 **Play Area Review** – during 2021/22 a review of play areas has been progressed across the Highland area which will support the development of a Play Area Strategy for Highland. A key element of the review has been to consider which play areas across communities are retained and upgraded and communities have been central to this process. Participation from groups within communities have assisted in determining which sites are prioritised, groups have supported the upgrade of sites through additional funding and shaped the design of play parks. Groups have also been involved in identifying the future use of sites no longer needed for formal play provision – often linked to the opportunity for food growing.

5.6 **Climate Action Towns:** In 2020 the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 'Protecting Scotland, Renewing Scotland' committed to develop a network of Climate Action Towns, focussing on small towns with little historical involvement in climate action. To realise this, Architecture and Design Scotland (A&DS) developed the Climate Action Towns project, investigating the intersection between community action, climate action and the Place Principle. A&DS are working collaboratively with local people and organisations in 7 small towns across Scotland during 2021/22, including Alness and Invergordon to:

- Bring small towns into the climate adaptation conversation
- Challenge and explore what types of place-based action can be taken in small towns
- Explore opportunities to support communities to deliver real change on the ground
- Use this to outline learning at a town scale that can be applied across Scotland.

Year 1 of this project saw a mixture of online and in-person events that gathered key information, highlighted gaps, identified opportunities and most importantly started building and strengthening relationships between people, initiatives, organisations and businesses throughout the two communities. The plan for year 2 is to build on the progress made in the first year and drive forward supported community climate action.

5.7 **Place Based Approach:** in December 2021 the Council agreed a Place Based Framework. This was subsequently also agreed and adopted by the Community Planning Partnership Board. The Framework sets out a new way of working for the Council and the wider partnership.

There are key drivers which underpin this Framework, including the Scottish Government's Place Principle which requests that all those responsible for providing services and looking after assets in a place need to work and plan together, and with local communities, to improve the lives of people, support inclusive and sustainable economic growth and create more successful places. It aligns with Christie Commission recommendations, community empowerment legislation, new planning legislation and the Council's commitments to support greater local decision making and community involvement. It also aims to improve communication and provide greater certainty to

communities on how partners will support changes in a particular area, and to support and guide local communities in preparing plans for their own plans under new legislation.

As a partnership there is a need to apply a place lens to all that we do so that we can ensure that local needs and strengths are understood and local priorities can be supported alongside the wider national and regional policy context. To apply this place lens is to apply a place-based approach, focussing our effort and intention on communities and their strengths.

A key element of the Placed Based Framework is Area Place Plans. These Plans will set out the vision, ambition and priorities for people and place in a particular area. This will support targeting resources, service delivery and provide a clear vision for attracting external investment. The Plans will help The Highland Council, partners, and communities to secure funding by evidencing the impact of every pound spent and the actions associated will provide clarity and manage expectation around how and where resources are prioritised. Community participation is critical to the development of the priorities and vision for Area Place Plans and in turn delivery of the local priorities identified.

The Area Place Plans undertaken to date in Highland, such as Fort William 2040 and Skye & Raasay Future, have been designed to directly respond to the Place Principle by establishing a shared vision and proposition for a place and focus for partners to collaborate and coordinate its delivery. Work is progressing to take forward Area Place Plans in Inverness and Easter Ross which will incorporate and align also to locality planning, and this approach will be rolled out to areas across Highland.

At the same time, local groups and organisations already established in a community are being encouraged and supported to collaborate in the development of their own local place plan.

5.8 Participatory Resourcing Approach: during 2021/22, the Council agreed a new approach to participatory resourcing. As part of the budget setting process, the Council committed to working with communities and partners to identify shared priorities within an area to ensure resources, funding and action are targeted to address the needs of people and place. Participatory resourcing builds on the previous model of participatory budgeting which involved communities directing discretionary grant spend. This approach will involve communities in developing local priorities and service design across a range of budget areas.

The Council has already shown a commitment to devolving expenditure decisions to local committees. Since 2021/22 3 local committees have made decisions on key external funding streams totalling £4,764,405, enabling far more funds to be decided and distributed locally. In addition, place-based funding totalling £2.777m has also been delegated from the Council, with £2.31m allocated for place-based investment and carry forward of unspent Ward Covid funds of £0.467m.

Public engagement will identify priorities for targeting funds to inform area committee decisions on allocations, including Coastal Communities Funds, Place Based Investment Funds, and Area Play Funds. As this approach evolves, the aim will be to include other mainstream budgets delegated to local level. Where Area Place Plans have been developed, e.g. Skye and Raasay Futures, the priorities are already directing the allocation and direction of spend of local funds. The roll out of Area Place Plans across Highland will further support greater local participation and involvement in service design, priority setting and delivery.

- 5.9 **Participatory Resourcing in Action:** An extensive engagement exercise on community regeneration funding is about to be launched which will take forward the new approach to participatory resourcing. This will inform priorities for funding and support Members in their decision making within Area Committees as it will ensure that allocations of grant aid over which the Council has control are closely aligned with local priority need. This exercise will provide invaluable information from participation of community partners and the public as a precursor to Area Place Planning.

In addition to third sector partners' provision of 'hard copy' community consultation tool kits to support participation offline, a website will be launched for broad engagement. This will be an interactive platform for members of the public, community organisations and agencies to participate in deliberation of the specific needs of the area in which they live, work, or operate. The platform provides supporting information about each area to guide and inform use. Insights arising from this feedback will in turn inform prioritisation of investments for each area, including a ranked list of priorities for funding in each area and examples of priority projects to deliver these.

- 5.10 **Engagement and Involvement Strategy:** as previously reported to this committee, there is an intention to develop a broader Engagement and Involvement Strategy for the Council. This will reflect how the organisation will engage and involve our communities in how we operate, and help support developing and improving our involvement and relationships with communities across Highland and their involvement in service design, planning and delivery.

A core element of any strategy will be to ensure that we are taking an inclusive approach to involving our communities. Inclusive approaches to engagement and ensuring that we are including and involving all members of our community, must be central to any engagement strategy.

One strand of this wider piece of work is just commencing, to explore a digital approach to improving the Council's approach to public involvement and engagement. With the move to greater public involvement in service design and delivery – both strategically and locally – the Council requires an online tool to support gathering public views and opinions in a more systematic and efficient way. This is an approach that has been adopted by many Local Authorities in Scotland to improve the way they engage and involve the public, therefore this builds on good practice already in place.

This will support the Council in meeting the Participatory Budgeting duty but also the broader duties of greater public involvement and inclusive engagement. It will also

support targeting geographical communities – supporting place planning - and communities of interest, supporting our Equality and Fairer Scotland Duties. The learning from the current interactive platform being utilised for the community regeneration exercise, will help to inform the process.

An update on this will be reported to a future meeting of the Communities and Place Committee.

6. Scottish Government Annual Report on Participation Requests

- 6.1 The Annual Report can be found at appendix 1. In addition to the broader approach to participation outlined in section 5, the following key points are noted;
- During 2021/22 there were no participation requests received.
 - The report notes the Council's intention to foster a culture of participation and involvement and embed this throughout our process rather than focus specifically on participation requests.
 - The Council promotes participation requests through the website and provides a single point of contact for groups wishing to pursue a request.
- 6.2 As part of this year's report, the Scottish Government have posed a series of questions to help inform the review of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 which was commenced in July 2022. The following responses are proposed to the questions that focus on Participation Requests. It is anticipated that there will be further opportunity to input into the review in the months ahead, which is intended to conclude during the second half of 2023.
- 6.3.1 ***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 has provided a process for community bodies and public agencies to follow however, unlike Community Asset Transfer, it is difficult to determine whether this has made things easier or more *complicated* for groups to take forward a request to be more involved.
- It has been challenging to consider requests arising where the community body has already been participating in dialogue or partnership working with council services but has become frustrated with either outcomes arrived at or the capacity of services to resource activity towards perceived priority outcomes. It has therefore been vital that approaches to community participation seek to develop and enhance community understanding of relevant statutory, regulatory and resource constraints as they apply to particular outcomes of interest.
- 6.3.2 ***2. Where can things be further improved, and what needs to change?***
- In reality, if local engagement and participation process are working well, there should be no need for this legislation.

Simplification of the language and process for participation requests would be of benefit to communities. The current language used of 'outcome improvement process' is confusing and doesn't capture the intended purpose of what the Act is trying to achieve.

The proposed review and appeal mechanism for Participation Requests being developed by SCDC's working group has potential to impose a significant administrative burden on Relevant Authorities, given the tendency for some applicant groups to seek to use the process for purposes other than outcome improvement; e.g. to leverage increased allocation of resource to a local concern, or to dispute prior decisions by services. Recent formal and informal requests have tended towards seeking to leverage the Council's support for applicant priorities (e.g. increased allocation of resources), rather than being focused on how participation by the community body may enhance or improve wider outcomes for the community.

6.3.3 ***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.***

Support for community and public bodies related to participation requests is not clear.

6.3.4 ***4. What would you like to see now, to further empower Scotland's communities?***

In relation to participation requests, and in addition to 5.2 above, a broader approach to participation and involvement would be more reflective of community response and action and have a greater beneficial impact on communities.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

Date: 3 August 2022

Author: Alison Clark, Head of Community Support and Engagement

Appendix 1: Participation Requests Annual Report



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

Section One – Public Service Authority Information

Organisation: Highland Council
Address: Glenurquhart Rd, Inverness, IV3 5NX
Completed by: Alison Clark
Role: Head of Community Support and Engagement
Email: Alison.Clark@Highland.gov.uk
Date of completion: 26-7-22
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 2020 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
None	None	None	None	None

2.1 Please provide details of Participation Requests received using the legislation and out with 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.
<p>No formal PRs received during 2021/22.</p> <p>See sections 2.2 and 3 below for detail and comment on activity out with the formal process.</p>					

2.2 Please use this space to provide any further comments relating to the above data.

Rate your Estate - During 2021 - 2022 the Highland Council Housing Tenant Participation Team carried out 11 Rate your Estate inspections at the request of Registered Tenant Groups. A Rate your Estate is where local tenants and residents join Council Officers, and quite often a local councillor, to jointly inspect their housing estate and prioritise areas for improvement.

Community Development - Area-based Community Support Coordinators were appointed in August 2021 and facilitated over 1600 interactions with community groups across Highland during their first six months' activity in this new role. Key aspects of the role include:

- supporting communities recovering from the pandemic
- co-ordinating and deliver humanitarian and resilience support
- building on community networks that emerged through the pandemic and building community capacity to deliver local priorities
- encouraging participation and involvement in Council priority setting, re-focusing partnership priorities and supporting place-based planning

Priority themes arising from community-driven participation in resilience planning have been identified as mental health and wellbeing, social inclusion, and food support. Another identified priority has been signposting and information required for groups' effective engagement with public services. This groundwork in community development and review is fundamental to groups' underlying capacity to participate in other mechanisms for Place Planning and service improvement.

Food Growing – A Community Food Growing Coordinator was appointed in August 2021 to engage with groups seeking to develop new responses to food poverty, food network resilience and climate adaptation. Approaches being developed at a local level continue to inform and shape wider delivery of this strategic priority through the participation of ambitious groups with a vision for their local areas through discussion with council services. This has in particular involved participation of community bodies in review and planning for the future of amenity and open spaces. A green space mapping of resources has begun to bring about further demand and act as a catalyst for increased uptake of community food growing projects.

Play Area Review – during 2021/22 a review of play areas has been progressed across the Highland area which will support the development of a Play Area Strategy for Highland. A key element of the review has been to consider which play areas across communities are retained and upgraded and communities have been central to this process. Participation from groups within communities have assisted in determining which sites are prioritised, groups have supported the upgrade of sites through additional funding and shaped the design of play parks and groups have also been involved in identifying the future use of sites no longer needed for formal play provision – often linked to potential for food growing.

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 approach taken in Highland is to foster a culture of participation and involvement and to embed this throughout our processes rather than focus specifically on participation requests.

Council officers will support any organisation wishing to submit a participation request and all information, including guidance and application is available online.

The Council's Community Support Coordinators will work alongside Highland Third Sector Interface partners, conducting extensive engagement at local level on priorities, challenges and opportunities for community-led responses. This broad engagement aims to encourage participation in areas such as community action planning, participation in Place Planning and consideration of other mechanisms such as Participation Requests.

Highland's approach to community learning and development is embedded in area community planning structures. The area based CLD networks help to inform community partners' understanding of developing priorities in each area and promote opportunities for broader engagement and participation of key third sector and community stakeholders in the work of Community Partnerships.

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).

The Council currently promotes the opportunity of participation requests through its website and through officer contact with relevant community groups and community councils – including Ward Management and Community Support Coordinators. Groups indicating they wish to engage in this process are guided on what qualifies as an outcome through the central Community Support team. Where appropriate, available support over group governance and community engagement is signposted. A single point of contact has been established for all requests to be considered.

As noted at 3.1, the Council has taken a broader approach to participation and involvement and is seeking to encourage greater community involvement in service design, planning and delivery through local engagement through Area Committees, Community Partnerships and its developing Place Based Approach. Since August 2021, the Council has employed 10 temporary Community Support Coordinators whose role it is to engage and support communities to engage and get involved in service priority planning and delivery.

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 recognises the importance of building inclusive approaches to engagement into its service planning and engagement approaches. A newly agreed equality outcome is that:

Identified groups have improved experiences of access to services and greater involvement in service planning, design and decision making.

Since August 2021, the Council has employed 10 temporary Community Support Coordinators whose role it is to engage and support communities to engage and get involved in service priority planning and delivery. CSCs have a key role in encouraging inclusive approaches to involvement and participation across communities through the course of their activity.

Regarding accessible information, our standard statement to 'request this file in another format such as large print, Braille or in a different language' accompanies the online participation request form. Our guidance on the Community Facing Process is written in clear, plain English. The Council also has arrangements in place to access interpretation services, including in-house BSL interpretation provision when needed.

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 out with formal participation requests).

A key priority of the Council continues to be to improve the Council's working with communities and partners and encourage greater involvement in service design, priority setting and delivery.

Place Based Approach: in December 2021 the Council agreed a Place Based Framework. This was subsequently also agreed and adopted by the Community Planning Partnership Board. The Framework set out a new way of working for the Council and the wider partnership. There are key drivers which underpin this Framework, including the Scottish Government's Place Principle which requests that all those responsible for providing services and looking after assets in a place need to work and plan together, and with local communities, to improve the lives of people, support inclusive and

sustainable economic growth and create more successful places. It aligns with Christie Commission recommendations, community empowerment legislation, new planning legislation and the Council's commitments to support greater local decision making and community involvement. It also aims to improve communication and provide greater certainty to communities on how partners will support changes in a particular area, and to support and guide local communities in preparing plans for their own plans under new legislation.

As a partnership there is a need to apply a place lens to all that we do so that we can ensure that local needs and strengths are understood and local priorities can be supported- alongside the wider national and regional policy context. To apply this place lens is to apply a place-based approach, focussing our effort and intention on communities and their strengths.

A key element of the Placed Based Framework is Area Place Plans. These Plans will set out the vision, ambition and priorities for people and place in a particular area. This will support targeting resources, service delivery and provide a clear vision for attracting external investment. The Plans will help The Highland Council, partners, and communities to secure funding by evidencing the impact of every pound spent and the actions associated will provide clarity and manage expectation around how and where resources are prioritised. Community participation is critical to the development of the priorities and vision for Area Place Plans and in turn delivery of the local priorities identified. The Area Place Plans undertaken to date in Highland, such as Fort William 2040 and Skye & Raasay Future, have been designed to directly respond to the Place Principle by establishing a shared vision and proposition for a place and focus for partners to collaborate and coordinate its delivery. Work is progressing to take forward Area Place Plans in Inverness and Easter Ross which will incorporate and align also to locality planning, and this approach will be rolled out to areas across Highland.

At the same time, local groups and organisations already established in a community are being encouraged and supported to collaborate in the development of their own local place plan.

Participatory Resourcing Approach – during 2021/22, the Council agreed a new approach to participatory resourcing. As part of the budget setting process, the Council committed to working with communities and partners to identify shared priorities within an area to ensure resources, funding and action are targeted to address the needs of people and place. Participatory resourcing builds on the previous model of participatory budgeting which involved communities directing discretionary grant spend. This approach will involve communities in developing local priorities and service design across a range of budget areas.

The Council has already shown a commitment to devolving expenditure decisions to local committees. Since 2021/22 3 local committees have made decisions on key external funding streams totalling £4,764,405, enabling far more funds to be decided and distributed locally. In addition, place-based funding totalling £2.777m has also been delegated from the Council, with £2.31m allocated for place-based investment and carry forward of unspent Ward Covid funds of £0.467m.

Public engagement will identify priorities for targeting funds to inform area committee decisions on allocations, including Coastal Communities Funds, Place Based Investment Funds, and Area Play Funds. As this approach evolves, the aim will be to include other mainstream budgets delegated to local level. Where Area Place Plans have been developed, e.g. Skye and Raasay Futures, the priorities are already directing the allocation and direction of spend of local funds. The roll out of Area Place Plans across Highland will further support greater local participation and involvement in service design, priority setting and delivery.

Participatory Resourcing in Action - An extensive engagement exercise on community regeneration funding is about to be launched which will take forward this new approach to participatory resourcing. This will inform priorities for funding and ensure that allocations of grant aid over which the Council has control are closely aligned with local priority need. This exercise will provide invaluable information from participation of community partners and the public as a precursor to Area Place Planning. In addition to third sector partners' provision of 'hard copy' community consultation tool kits to support participation offline, a website will be launched for broad engagement. This will be an interactive platform for members of the public, community organisations and agencies to participate in deliberation of the specific needs of the area in which they live, work, or operate. The platform provides supporting information about each area to guide and inform use. Insights arising from this feedback will in turn inform prioritisation of investments for each area, including a ranked list of priorities for funding in each area and examples of priority projects to deliver these.

Engagement and Involvement Platform: work is beginning to explore a digital approach to improve the Council's approach to public involvement and engagement. With the move to greater public involvement in service design and delivery – both strategically and locally – the Council requires an online tool to support gathering public views and opinions in a more systematic and efficient way. This is an approach that has been adopted by many Local Authorities in Scotland to improve the way they engage and involve the public, therefore this builds on good practice already in place.

This would support the Council in meeting the Participatory Budgeting duty but also the broader duties of greater public involvement and inclusive engagement. This would also support targeting geographical communities – supporting place planning - and communities of interest, supporting our Equality and Fairer Scotland Duties. The learning from the current interactive platform being utilised for the community regeneration exercise, will help to inform the process.

Climate Action Towns: In 2020 the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 'Protecting Scotland, Renewing Scotland' committed to develop a network of Climate Action Towns, focussing on small towns with little historical involvement in climate action. To realise this, Architecture and Design Scotland (A&DS) developed the Climate Action Towns project, investigating the intersection between community action, climate action and the Place Principle. A&DS are working collaboratively with local people and organisations in 7 small towns across Scotland during 2021/22, including Alness and Invergordon to:

- Bring small towns into the climate adaptation conversation
- Challenge and explore what types of place-based action can be taken in small towns
- Explore opportunities to support communities to deliver real change on the ground
- Use this to outline learning at a town scale that can be applied across Scotland.

Year 1 of this project saw a mixture of online and in-person events that gathered key information, highlighted gaps, identified opportunities and most importantly started building and strengthening relationships between people, initiatives, organisations and businesses throughout the two communities. The plan for year 2 is to build on the progress made in the first year and drive forward supported community climate action.

Community Partnerships: the approach to community planning in Highland recognises the considerable geographical size of the area and has established 9 local Community Partnership to lead on local planning to address inequality. Each local partnership is comprised of public, third and community sector partners that lead on locality planning at a local level. The aim is to directly involve communities and community bodies in the planning and delivery of partnership priorities. During 2021/22, the CPP Board agreed a new approach to resourcing Community Partnerships to support the delivery of action and ensure greater participation and involvement of communities in the process. These partnership will provide a close and vital link in the development of area place plans, ensuring the alignment with locality planning within communities.

Equality Group Engagement: One of the Council's Equality Outcomes includes a specific priority to improve engagement and involvement with individuals with protected characteristics. As we move forward, it is crucial that the engagement framework considers how to include and embed the views of equality groups. This is particularly important as we emerge from Covid-19 with the understanding that certain equality groups have faced challenges and experienced differences in health, economic and social outcomes resulting from of the virus and the measures to contain it. A focus on promoting equality and tackling inequalities is embedded each of the approaches referred to above and should ensure an inclusive approach to involvement with communities and will inform our work to engage with equality groups going forward.

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.

Please see above in response to 3.4

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?

There have been no participation requests over the past year. Community participation bodies continue to experience difficulties with articulating what they wish to achieve within the terms of the language of 'outcomes'.

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

NA

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

Please see below in response to section 5

If you have developed any case study material or published new information about Participation Requests please share links to those with us here.

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 has provided a process for community bodies and public agencies to follow however, unlike Community Asset Transfer, it is difficult to determine whether this has made things easier or *more complicated* for groups to take forward a request to be more involved.

It has been challenging to consider requests arising where the community body has already been participating in dialogue or partnership working with council services but has become frustrated with either outcomes arrived at or the capacity of services to resource activity towards perceived priority outcomes. It has therefore been vital that approaches to community participation seek to develop and enhance community understanding of relevant statutory, regulatory and resource constraints as they apply to particular outcomes of interest.

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

In reality, if local engagement and participation process are working well, there should be no need for this legislation.

Simplification of the language and process for participation requests would be of benefit to communities. The current language used of 'outcome improvement process' is confusing and doesn't capture the intended purpose of what the Act is trying to achieve.

The proposed review and appeal mechanism for Participation Requests being developed by SCDC's working group has potential to impose a significant administrative burden on Relevant Authorities, given the tendency for some applicant groups to seek to use the process for purposes other than outcome improvement; e.g. to leverage increased allocation of resource to a local concern, or to dispute prior decisions by services. Recent formal and informal requests have tended towards seeking to leverage the Council's support for applicant priorities (e.g. increased allocation of resources), rather than being focused on how participation by the community body may enhance or improve wider outcomes for the community.

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.*

Support for community and public bodies related to participation requests is not clear.

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

In relation to participation requests, and in addition to 5.2 above, a broader approach to participation and involvement would be more reflective of community response and action and have a greater beneficial impact on communities.

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