

Agenda Item	7.
Report No	CP/27/24

# THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Communities and Place

**Date:** 27 November 2024

**Report Title:** Community Participation and Involvement Update

**Report By:** Assistant Chief Executive – 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 is reflected in the Council's commitment to place based planning and local decision making. 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 achieve that. 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 and provides an update of the work that has taken place over the last 2 years to increase and improve participation and involvement across Highland.

## 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** - There are no direct resource implications as a result of this report. The work outlined is planned and budgeted for.
- 3.2 **Legal** - 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 **Gaelic** - There are not considered to be any implications.
- 3.4 **Risk** - There are no risk implications identified in the report.
- 3.5 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** - There are no health and safety implications as a result of this report.
- 3.6 **Gaelic** - there are no specific implications arising from this report.

### **4. Impacts**

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken. Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.2 This is an annual monitoring report and therefore an impact assessment is not required
- 4.3 This is a monitoring and report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

### **5. Background**

- 5.1 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 its 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.
- 5.2 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 to achieve an improvement in a specific area of service delivery. 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, 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.

- 5.3 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.

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.

- 5.4 The final section of the report summarises key points from the Annual Report whilst also outlining the proposed response to questions posed by the Scottish Government - with a specific focus here on learning from Participation Requests.

## 6. Improving Participation and Involvement

- 6.1 Over the last 24 months there has been a number of strands of work progressed to encourage greater participation and involvement from communities. These include:

- 6.2 **Rate your Estate** - During 2022-24 the Highland Council Housing Tenant Participation Team carried out 10 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.

- 6.3 **Community Development** - Area-based Community Support Coordinators were appointed from August 2021 until March 2023 and facilitated over 2000 interactions with community groups across Highland during this period. Key aspects of the role included:

- supporting communities recovering from the Covid 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

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

- 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.

6.4 **Food Growing** – A Community Food Growing Coordinator was appointed from August 2021 until the end of March 2024 to engage with groups seeking to develop community food growing initiatives and access Council land.

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 the review of the Council's allotment policy. As well as aspects of delivery of the Highland Community Food Growing Strategy, such as collaboration between the Council and Highland Good Food Partnership on facilitation of a community food growing network and workshop series.

6.5 **Play Area Review** – during 2021/22 a review of play areas was 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.

A Play Coordinator has been appointed with a role to support communities to develop their local playparks to meet the Highland Council Strategy 2023-2033. What has evolved, and continues to evolve in different ways, is the cornucopia of participation from different stakeholders and professional relationship building. This creates a deeper understanding of the Play Strategy and encourages Council-wide cohesion with local communities.

A simple process has been developed for consulting with children, contacting local schools and nurseries to ask them to support children to complete a simple questionnaire on their 3 favourite types of play eg swinging, sliding, climbing, spinning, jumping etc. By using this method of child consultation, funds are spent on what young people think they need within their own communities. In addition, data is analysed to establish if any of the favourites could be joined together eg climbing frame with monkey bars. Once the data has been analysed, the community group and the play coordinator write a simple brief based on the child consultation. Once quotes are received, adults assess them for costs and appropriateness of meeting the Play Strategy. Children then see the final range of designs to vote on their favourite one which is then installed. By using this method, the design of all recently developed playparks is truly child-led.

6.6 **Whin Park Redevelopment Project** – one specific example of involvement on play area development is at Whin Park in Inverness. To aid with the creation of the design brief, an online questionnaire was distributed in April 2023 which received 804 responses which was aimed at all users of the park across Highland. In addition, specific engagement was undertaken with schools located within the immediate area of the park by the play parks Community Support Co-ordinator and the Community Support Officer from the Community Development team. These sessions engaged with 134 young people within 4 primary schools and 1 secondary school. There was also engagement with SNAP (Special Needs Action Project) to gather views on inclusivity and accessibility.

Following a tender exercise, further engagement was undertaken to identify the preferred design by the public. A public vote was held that sought to understand the preferences in general but also the preference by different age groups. 2,817 votes were received with the majority of responses (60.2%) from young people under the age of 18 which correlated

with the face-to-face engagement undertaken by the Community Support Co-ordinator for play parks.

- 6.7 **Corran Ferry** – in response to community concerns about the operation of the Corran Ferry and plans for a replacement vessel, a specific Corran Ferry Steering Group was established. The key purpose of the group is to ensure links between Highland Councillors, Community Councils and officers involved in the Corran Ferry project are maintained and everyone can be engaged within the project. Representatives from the 6 Community Councils of Ardgour, Nether Lochaber, West Ardnamurchan, Sunart, Morvern and Acharacle are invited to attend each meeting and feedback to their individual Councils.

The Group is an informal working group which is part of a larger project governance structure that involves Lochaber Committee, the Corran Ferry Project Board with decision making powers being deferred to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee and Full Council.

- 6.8 **Ecology Strategy** – The Highland Council's first Ecology Strategy was developed through an extensive consultation process, engaging a wide range of stakeholders and community members to ensure broad representation. The consultation included workshops with the Highland Environment Forum, community councils, and members of the public, along with a focused workshop on the marine environment. These in-person and virtual workshops allowed participants to review and discuss the strategy's draft goals, planned actions, and specific areas of ecological concern. This has resulted in changes being made to documents in terms of style and accessibility to encourage engagement. Further improvements to the engagement process are continuing.

- 6.9 **Gaelic Development** - the Gaelic Team works closely with age 0-3 groups and Adult Learning for Gaelic Learning classes and worked with volunteers to introduce a local Mòd to the community.

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

A key element of the Place Based Framework is Area Place Plans. These Plans set out the vision, ambition and priorities for people and place in a particular area. This supports targeting of resources, service delivery and provides 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 (APP) 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. The Black Isle has recently completed its Area Place Plan (adopted by the Black Isle and Easter Ross Committee in August 2024). APPs for Inverness, Nairn and Easter Ross are almost complete with the APPs for Caithness, Sutherland, Wester Ross, Strathpeffer & Lochalsh and Lochaber all in process. Some are being delivered with Highland Council providing the lead role, while others are being led by community groups. All focus on creating a shared vision for the local area.

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 which will be used to feed in as evidence to the Highland Local Development Plan. The Council's Development Plans team and Community Support and Engagement team will provide guidance to groups wishing to progress these plans.

- 6.11 **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 continued and extended its commitment to devolving expenditure decisions to local committees. During 2022/23 and 2023/24, local committees have made decisions on key external funding streams totalling £7,446,961, enabling far more funds to be decided and distributed locally. In both years, area committees received a devolved allocation of Highland Coastal Communities funding (which is generated from the Crown Estates net revenues), and Scottish Government Placed Based Investment Programme funds. In 2023/24 there was an additional devolved award through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

During 2023/24, some local committees have chosen to devolve local car park income directly to Community Councils / Development Trusts to allocate local funds and a participatory budgeting approach has been adopted as part of the Whole Family Wellbeing programme. As part of the work of the Merkinch / South Kessock Community Action Group(CAG), Youth Highland undertook a consultation among children and young people in the community (involving over 400 CYP) and defined 6 clear outcomes for ways in which the young people would like to see improvements in their community. Through the Community Action Group, a proposal was formulated to fund a Participatory Budgeting initiative (Your Place Your Point) from the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme and deliver this in partnership with the CAG, Police Scotland, Youth Highland, HTSI and the Scottish Community Development Centre. Community voting took place both online and in person and approximately £31,000 distributed to 11 local projects.

Public engagement through the APP process is identifying priorities for targeting funds to inform area committee decisions on allocations across a number of funding streams such as the Community Regeneration Fund. As this approach evolves, the aim will be to include other mainstream budgets delegated to local level. The completion of Area Place Plans across Highland will further support greater local participation and involvement in service design, priority setting and delivery.

- 6.12 **Common Good Engagement Group (Nairn)** – in response to representations from the community in Nairn, a common good engagement group has been established in Nairn. Community Councils had expressed a desire for a stronger role in shaping the approach to the Common Good Fund in Nairn. The group also seeks to strengthen how the Council delivers on duties under the Community Empowerment Act 2015, taking account of Scottish Land Commission Good Practice Guidance.

The work of the Common Good Fund Engagement Group will be trailed for 24 months Meetings to date have focused on operational matters of the NCGF and how to collectively make better use of the land assets but also manage the assets for the benefits of the

members of the former Royal Burgh of Nairn.

- 6.13 **Community Councils** – full elections for all Community Councils (CCs) in Highland took place at the end of 2023. Since then there have been two full engagement exercises with all the new CCs to properly understand their support needs and to develop closer working with them and during 2024 – 2025, the full Scheme of Establishment will be reviewed.
- 6.14 **Children and Young People’s Participation Strategy** - A [Children and Young People’s Participation Strategy 2024 – 2029](#) has been developed and sets out the partnership’s commitment to and route map towards a Highland in which the meaningful participation of children and young people in decisions which affect them is a reality.

The strategy was developed by a cross-partnership steering group – which included young people – between March 2023 and August 2024. There was commitment from the outset to ensuring that children and young people across Highland would be at the heart of the strategy’s development and awareness that such co-production would require time and resource.

Over 800 children and young people from across Highland were involved in the engagement which informed the key themes of the strategy. This engagement took place over 6 months between October 2023 and April 2024 and was facilitated in large part by young facilitators employed by the steering group. The sessions, conversations, focus groups and surveys all sought to understand children and young people’s views on participation and what is required to ensure that it becomes a meaningful reality. The key themes they highlighted form the basis of the strategy and inform the commitments outlined.

The strategy was co-written by a group of nine people, five of which were young people. The implementation of the strategy will be overseen by the Children’s Rights Participation Delivery Group of the Integrated Children’s Services Board and will require the same cross-partnership commitment and co-production as have driven the development of the strategy itself.

## 7. Scottish Government Annual Report on Participation Requests

- 7.1 The Annual Report can be found at appendix 1. In addition to the broader approach to participation outlined in section 6, the following key points are noted:
- During 2022-24 there was one participation request received. The request which was refused as it was deemed not to be a valid Participation Request. This is because it requested additional activity by the Council, rather than to discuss how the community could improve outcomes through its participation. The applicants were already engaged with the appropriate Council team on this matter.
  - The report also provides information on the closure of a Participation Request received and previously agreed to. A participation request was submitted by Ferintosh Community Council (FCC) to Highland Council on 27 November 2020 and formally closed in July 2024. The objective of the request was: **Improved social and environmental wellbeing through community engagement on local priorities for maintenance and upkeep of roads, amenity and other outdoor spaces**. The Outcome Improvement process focused on the participation, voice and influence of Ferintosh Community Council around local priorities for maintenance and upkeep of roads. FCC and volunteers provided valuable information to support improving road conditions. The process and the resulting

efficiency savings only came about thanks to the two year commitment of 13 volunteers providing ideas and timely information. Consistent communication from the Council would have improved the experience and this is learning for the future.

- 7.2 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.

## 8. Next Steps

- 8.1 **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.
- 8.2 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, will be central to any engagement strategy.
- 8.3 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.
- 8.4 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 engagement, budget engagement and area place plans, will help to inform the process.
- 8.5 **Inclusive Approaches to Engagement** – as part of reviewing and developing the Council's next Equality Outcomes, engagement is planned with representative groups and users across Highland to better understand how the Council can improve outcomes from groups with protected characteristics. This work will take place in early 2025.
- 8.6 Agreed as a core action within Highland's BSL Plan, an Engagement Panel for BSL users will begin in January 2025. The Highland BSL Plan sets out how the Highland Council and NHS Highland will promote and raise awareness of BSL, as well as improving accessibility and inclusion of deaf and deafblind BSL users in our services. The BSL Plan Panel will meet quarterly and will monitor and review the actions in the Joint BSL Plan, with expertise and experiences of BSL users to assist in helping develop and deliver this work.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

Date: 8 November 2024

Author: Dot Ferguson, Senior Community Development Manager



Appendices: Appendix 1 Scottish Government Participation Requests Reporting Template 2023/24

## Participation Requests Reporting Template 2023/24 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 2023 to 31 March 2024. 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 each year, whether using this template or not.

### Section One – Public Service Authority Information

Organisation: The Highland Council

Completed by: Dot Ferguson Role: Senior Community Development Manager

Email: [dot.ferguson@highland.gov.uk](mailto:dot.ferguson@highland.gov.uk) Telephone: 01397 707253

Date of completion: 4<sup>th</sup> November 2024

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 2022/24**

Please complete following overview table:

<b>Total new applications received in 2022/24</b>	<b>Total applications received prior to 1 April 2022 which were still to be determined at 31 March 2024</b>	<b>Number of accepted applications in 2022/24</b>	<b>Number of applications agreed in 2022/24</b>	<b>Number of applications refused in 2022/24</b>
One	Two	None	None	One

Where you were unable to accept a participation request, was an alternative process put in place to discuss the group's issue and work with them or support offered to help them consider how to address their identified need? Please provide details:

The request which was refused was deemed not a valid Participation Request, as it was a request for additional activity by the Council, rather than to discuss how the community could improve outcomes through its participation. The applicants were already engaged with the appropriate Council team on this matter.

2.1 Please provide details of Participation Requests received using the legislation and outwith the legislation in the reporting year which resulted in changes to public services provided by or on behalf of your public service authority and tell us about those changes. Please also include details of requests received prior to 2023/24, which resulted in changes to the way of working being implemented in 2023/24.

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>Ferintosh Community Council seeking "Improved social and environmental wellbeing through community engagement on local priorities for maintenance and upkeep of roads, amenity and other outdoor spaces.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Ferintosh Community Council and The Highland Council had been in discussions over many years on how to work better together to better satisfy the requests of residents to improve the condition of roads, verges etc. with potholes as one of residents' top concerns.</p>	<p>FCC and Council Roads officers co-created a framework for appropriately trained community representatives to monitor and report information on local potholes to the Council's Roads team through FCC, to support more efficient and timely batching of road repairs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This approach to collaborative inspection of roads built upon an existing agreement with Council Amenities, where FCC undertook some voluntary grass cutting.</li> </ul>	<p>The Outcome Improvement process focused on the participation, voice and influence of Ferintosh Community Council around local priorities for maintenance and upkeep of roads. The Highland Council feels that FCC and volunteers provided valuable information to support improving road conditions.</p> <p>The process and the resulting efficiency savings only came about thanks to the two-year commitment of 13 volunteers providing ideas and timely information.</p> <p>Ferintosh Community Council was glad to hear that The Highland Council had been able to use its resources more efficiently using the local intelligence provided (so the specified outcome has been achieved). FCC feels that given Council resources are finite the project has demonstrated that community resource can enhance the productive application of these limited resources. FCC brought forward an idea that the Highland Council embraced immediately, and the Highland Council worked constructively with FCC to put the plans into practice. Unfortunately, over a period of over 6 months, there</p>	

			<p>was a cessation of communication by The Highland Council. Considerable extra lobbying effort by FCC and Highland Councillors was required to reactivate the project. The Highland Council responded well thereafter, and the partnership worked smoothly and effectively to continue to deliver efficiency savings. FCC felt that the partnership was then built on trust, honesty and a commitment to partnership and continues to this day.</p> <p>The Participation Request process is designed to challenge the community body to contribute to partnership working and not just to come forward and expect work to be carried out. FCC accepted and continues to accept this challenge in order to avoid any sense of entitlement and fully supports the further development of the Participation Request system.</p>	
--	--	--	---	--

**2.2 Please use this space to provide any further comments relating to the above data, such as:**

- **describing the outcome improvement process (whether or not it resulted from a formal participation request)**
- **how the community participation body was involved in designing the outcome improvement process**
- **how the community participation body participated in the outcome improvement process including taking part in decisions and delivering actions**
- **details of any wider benefits, such as improved community engagement and ongoing participation.**

The following Outcome Improvement Process was agreed and implemented:

A structured online workshop session was held with representatives of FCC, along with Council Officers from Ward Management and Policy, Roads and Infrastructure and the Area Committee Chair (at FCC's request). This focused on sharing understanding of local concerns and the Council's approach to maintenance and upkeep of roads and outdoor spaces.

The process has delivered a greater understanding of shared issues and a resulting closer working relationship with other community priorities now being identified for delivery.

### **Section Three – Partnership Working & Promotion of Participation Requests**

#### **3.1a 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?*

For the requests already received, there has been no specific engagement with support organisations. Requests have been dealt with by the relevant Highland Council services, largely due to the technical nature of the requests ie. roads / traffic management improvements.

However, the Council is strengthening its work with communities, demonstrated by the recently created Community Support and Engagement team. This team will have a particular focus on supporting its communities to achieve the priorities developed through the Area Place Planning process. A number of mechanisms will be necessary to achieve the outcomes identified in the Area Place Plans and it is anticipated that Participation Requests may be one method which may be useful for communities to achieve their preferred outcomes. In reality, it is hoped that this closer relationship will avoid the need for Participation Requests as the Council becomes more able to deliver on a place-based approach.

#### **3.1b Please tell us about any challenges you have had in accessing support.**

Due to the very low level of enquiries, accessing support has not been an issue. However, the Council has a close working relationship with organisations such as Highland Third Section Interface, local Councils of Voluntary Service, DTAS etc and regularly signposts groups to them for support.

#### **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's focus on Place-based service delivery and the creation of Area Place Plans has changed the Council's relationship with communities, putting them in a central position able to identify their priorities and have these formally acknowledged and adopted through the Area Committee structure. Although the Council continues to provide information on Participation Requests and a single point of contact on its website, the Council can now more easily and clearly identify and prioritise where communities wish infrastructure or processes / services to be delivered differently to improve outcomes. The newly created Community Support & Engagement team provides that closer link with communities to support these ambitions.

**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. We are particularly interested in any ways you have targeted those with protected characteristics to raise awareness of the PR process or support request submissions.*

As part of the Council's approaches to engagement consideration is given to how best to involve and include all members of the community. This includes people with protected characteristics but also considering the geographical context the Council operates in. Considering different methods and ways to gather and communicate messages are crucial.

The Council is in the process of developing an engagement and involvement strategy. 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, will be central to any engagement strategy.

**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 outwith formal participation requests).**

The engagement with communities and their participation in design processes is integral to the way the Council intends to move forward. The examples highlighted within the Annual Report to Council demonstrate that commitment and this work will continue as the Council redesigns its services to continue its drive to more effective and efficient public service delivery.

**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 the attached report to Communities and Place Committee for broader details about participation and involvement approaches.

**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?*

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

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

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