
UNDERSTANDING

PARTICIPATION REQUESTS

Informing User Experience, Guidance, and Legislation



Understanding Participation Requests: Informing User Experience, Guidance, and Legislation

Understanding Participation Requests is a research project conducted by Dr Cara Broadley, Research Fellow at the School of Innovation and Technology at the Glasgow School of Art. The research was commissioned and funded by the Scottish Government to contribute to the 2024 review of The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015).

We would like to thank all participants for their time and contributions to the research.

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**SCHOOL OF
INNOVATION
AND TECHNOLOGY
THE GLASGOW
SCHOOL OF ART**

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Glossary of Terms

***Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015):**

A law within Scotland that helps people and communities to access resources and develop capabilities to influence and inform local decisions. The Act has eleven parts that each focus on a different aspect of public engagement and participation.

****Community Participation Body:**

A community group who can make a Participation Request. The Act sets out the criteria for the community group so that it can qualify as a Community Participation Body.

****Outcomes:**

The effect or the difference that has been made because of a service, an activity, or a policy decision. In Participation Requests the outcome can be defined as the difference, the change, or the impact of the process.

****Outcome Improvement Process:**

A process in which a Community Participation Body and Public Service Authority turn ideas into action and achieve the aims of their Participation Request.

****Participation Request:**

Part three of the Act, through which community groups can request to have greater involvement in, and influence over, decisions and services that affect their lives.

****Public Service Authority:**

A public body such as a local authority, a health board, or a national agency such as Police Scotland. Participation Requests are submitted by Community Participation Bodies to Public Service Authorities. There are currently 77 eligible Public Service Authorities in Scotland.

* adapted from the Scottish Government's (2017) Participation Request Guidance, available from <https://www.gov.scot/publications/community-empowerment-participation-request-guidance/>

** adapted from the Scottish Community Development Centre's (2022) Participation Request Summary Guidance, available from: <https://www.scdc.org.uk/news/article/participation-request-summary-guidance>

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from the Understanding Participation Requests: Informing User Experience, Guidance, and Legislation research project, conducted by the School of Innovation and Technology at the Glasgow School of Art from August 2023 to January 2024. Commissioned and funded by the Scottish Government to contribute to the review of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015), the research aimed to enhance understandings of the impact of Part 3 of the Act, Participation Requests .

Participation Requests were introduced in 2017 as a policy mechanism to enable people and communities to shape decisions and services that affect their lives. In response to reviews and evaluations of the legislation, the School of Innovation and Technology carried out research funded by the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland from 2020 to 2022 through **Social Studios** that enabled communities to co-design a suite of interactive tools to enhance meaningful local decision-making in Scotland. This research builds on Social Studios by exploring opportunities to enhance the experiences of communities and organisations engaging with the Participation Request processes, the content and format of the supporting guidance, and the efficacy of the underpinning legislation.

Methods, Approach, and Findings

The research was framed by phases of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, and the visualisation and presentation of findings. Data collected from Annual Reports submitted by Public Service Authorities were quantitatively analysed to identify patterns and gaps in Participation Requests, with consideration to a range of socioeconomic and geographic factors. The research then carried out a series of eleven semi-structured interviews with fourteen representatives from Public Service Authorities and Community Participation Bodies with experience of Participation Requests. Aiming to provide in-depth insight into the implementation of Participation Requests, interview data was subsequently analysed to define key themes and insights.

The research findings highlighted challenges and opportunities surrounding Participation Requests, emphasising the importance of effective communication, inclusive engagement, and meaningful outcomes. The findings also provided insights into the distribution, evaluation, and impacts of Participation Requests, shedding light on the effectiveness and sustainability of the legislation.

Recommendations

Within these themes, ideas and proposals for enhancing Participation Requests were defined and positioned to inform the following set of seven recommendations for the Scottish Government:

1. Provide guidance around establishing early dialogue as a first step in the Participation Request process.
2. Revise the list of eligible Public Service Authorities to include further public sector structures and organisations.
3. Develop and deliver updated information sessions for Public Service Authorities to clarify and reiterate the purpose and scope of the legislation.
4. Support Community Participation Bodies and Public Service Authorities to co-design the Outcome Improvement Process.
5. Introduce a formal requirement and mechanisms for Public Service Authorities to report Participation Request activity directly to the Scottish Government.
6. Produce guidance and resources for monitoring, evaluating, and disseminating Participation Request outcomes and impact.
7. Co-develop with Public Service Authorities local and national strategies to enhance public promotion, awareness, and understanding of Participation Requests.

These recommendations, and accompanying strategies and actions for implementation, are put forward as the outcome of this research to support the Scottish Government's wider report on the effectiveness of Participation Requests of under their existing review of The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015).

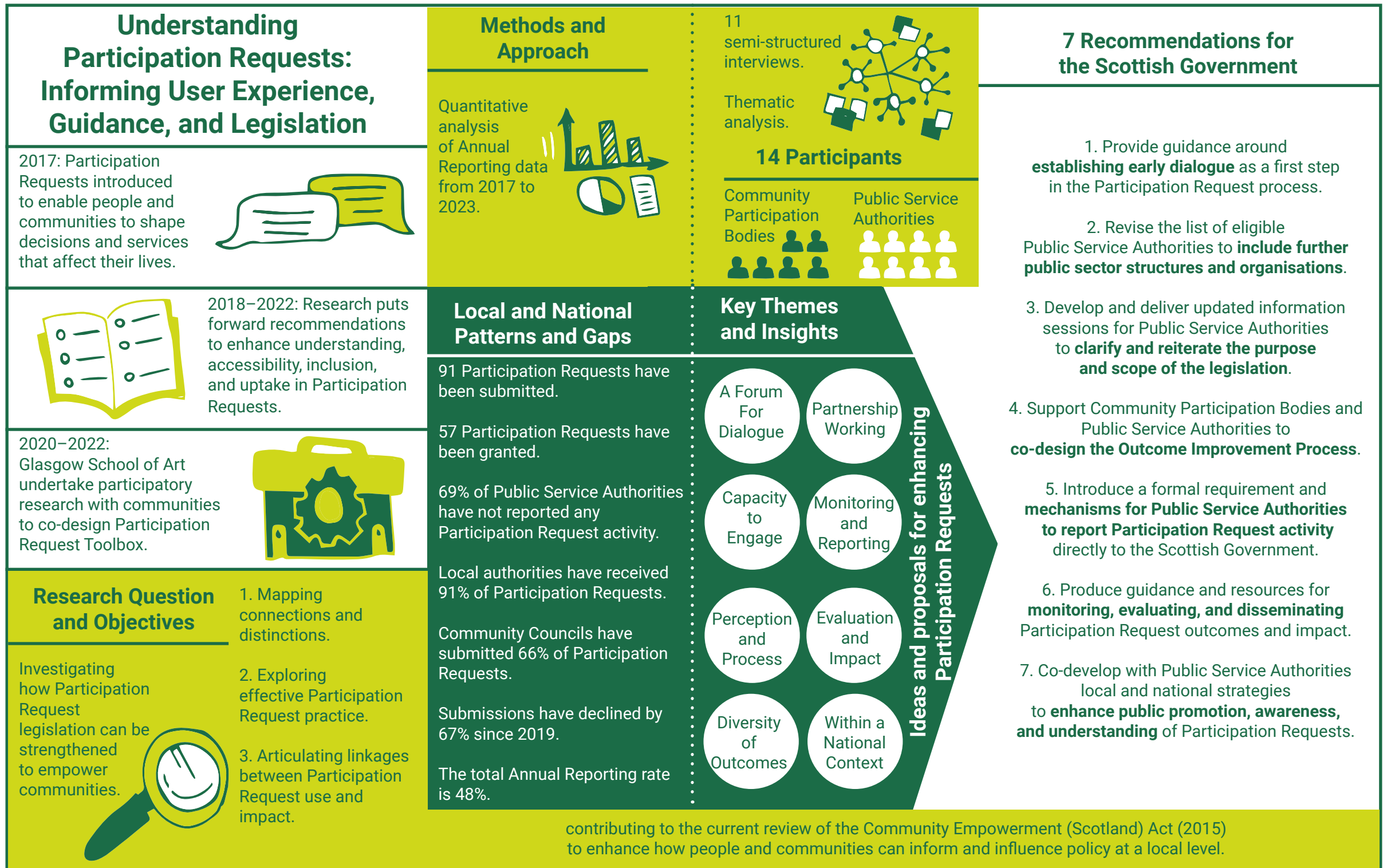


Figure 1. Understanding Participation Requests Research Summary (diagram). 2023. Cara Broadley.

Research Context, Background, and Introduction

Participation Requests are a mechanism within the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015) that enable Community Participation Bodies to shape decisions and services that affect their lives by taking part in an Outcome Improvement Process with a relevant Public Service Authority. Research and evaluation around the efficacy of Participation Requests (Paterson, 2018; Plotnikova and Bennett, 2018; Hill O'Connor and Steiner, 2018) has underlined a need to increase access for a broader range of communities and less formally-organised groups, improve transparency and understanding in Participation Request guidance to combat scepticism and ambiguity, and build people's confidence and capabilities to play an active role in their communities. Evaluations of Participation Requests also underline a tendency for standardised community engagement approaches to reproduce the participation of high-capacity communities over those who are under-represented or seldom-heard (McMillan et al., 2020).

Participation Requests and Democratic Innovation

These issues continue to be acknowledged and tackled through a range of participatory and deliberative processes or democratic innovations that aim to engage individuals and groups in influencing decisions surrounding civic and political life such as citizens' assemblies, mini-publics, participatory budgeting, online citizen forums, and e-democracy (Escobar and Elstub, 2017). Recognising an upsurge of collaborative processes and institutions developing democratic innovations within formal policymaking contexts, Bennett et al. (2021: 2-3) posit Participation Requests as a form of governance-driven democratisation (Warren, 2009: 3) with potential to limit public engagement in Participation Requests to established, organised, and experienced community groups.

Participation through and for Design

Bennett et al.'s proposition that such democratic innovations be 'co-produced between (various) institutions and communities to bring a participatory and deliberative corrective to temper dominant bureaucratic logics' (2021: 3) aligned with Social Studios' aim to understand the role of Participatory Design in reimagining Participation Requests. In Social Studios, Community Participation Bodies co-designed and evaluated a Toolbox to support productive Participation Request engagement. In foregrounding the material qualities and relational capacities of creative and participatory methods and tools, the research led to a set of four recommendations to strengthen engagement, equality, collaboration, and outcomes in Participation Requests (Broadley and Dixon, 2022). Where relevant and appropriate, Understanding Participation Requests refers to Social Studios' tools and findings as a means of corroborating and strengthening recommendations for the Scottish Government.

Research Aim, Question, and Objectives

This research aims to contribute further recommendations to the current review of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015) to enhance how people and communities can inform and influence policy at a local level. The review comprises analysis of survey responses carried out by The Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) focusing on improving the Participation Request process and the quality of participation in the public sector more broadly and exploring the need for and potential of an appeals pathway; an online survey and call for written views; and contributions from invited Participation Request expert panels, both led by the Scottish Parliament's Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee.

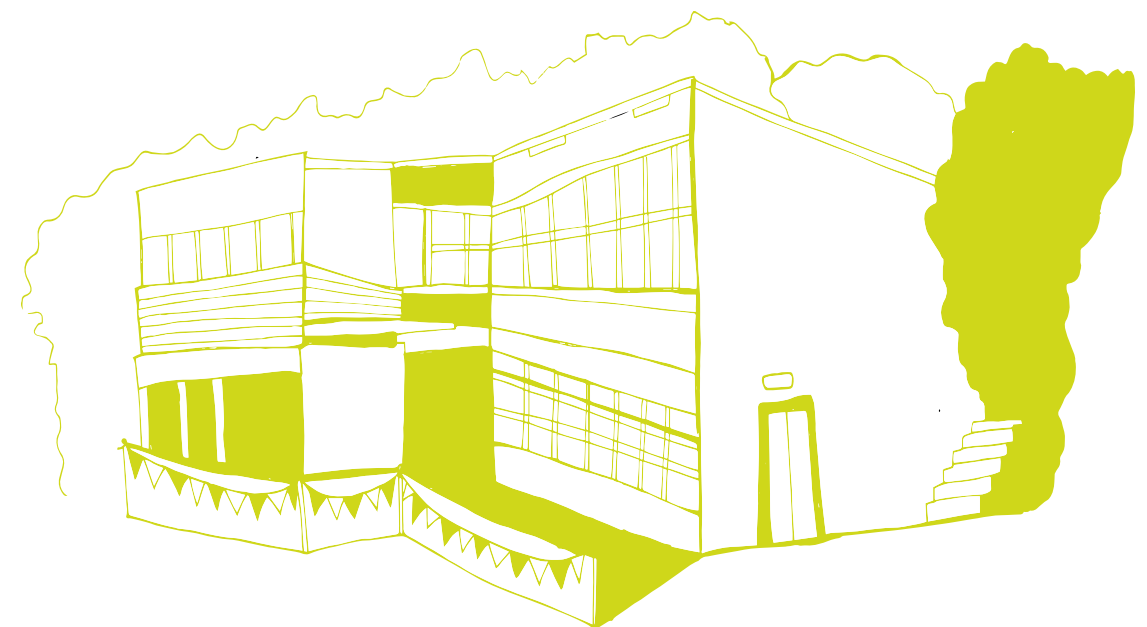


Understanding Participation Requests aims to complement these approaches and responses by addressing the research question *how can Participation Request legislation be strengthened to empower communities?* This is broken down into the following corresponding objectives:

1. Mapping patterns, gaps, connections, and distinctions across Participation Request users' experiences, regional variations, the local issues that Participation Requests have addressed, and the outcomes that have been achieved.
2. Exploring examples of effective Participation Request practice and understanding how and where Participation Requests have led to other forms of participation.
3. Articulating linkages between Participation Request use and impact across Scotland, the content and quality of current sources of guidance and support, and the efficacy of the legislative framework, and proposing ways that these could be more meaningfully aligned.

Report Structure

This report continues in the next section by outlining the methodological approach underpinning the research, before presenting a discussion of the thematic analysis undertaken and associated findings. These findings inform a series of recommendations concerning the future of Participation Requests and proposals to strengthen their capacity to inform and influence local decision-making. The report concludes by revisiting the research question and objectives and how they have been addressed, and presenting research limitations and reflections.



Research Methods and Approach

The research adopted a mixed methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative modes of data collection and analysis. Mixed methods offer a comprehensive, validated, and contextually rich understanding of complex policy issues such as Participation Requests, that involve a diverse range of people, attitudes, behaviours, cultures, and systems. This approach enhances the credibility of findings, provides a holistic perspective, and increases the relevance of the recommendations, ultimately leading to more informed and impactful policy decisions.

As set out in Figure 2, the core of the research is structured around the following phases and activities, each punctuated by formative and iterative stages of thematic analysis:

Phase 1: Quantitative Data Analysis – exploratory thematic analysis of 2017 to 2023 Annual Reporting data provided by the Scottish Government; additional desk-based data collection; data visualisation; identifying preliminary findings and focal areas of inquiry (August–September 2023).

Phase 2: Semi-Structured Interviews – ethical assessment, participant recruitment, and development of topic guide to frame and carry out eleven qualitative interviews with Public Service Authorities and Community Participation Bodies (October–November 2023).

Phase 3: Qualitative Data Analysis and Developing Recommendations – thematic analysis of interview transcripts; recommendations generated based on emergent findings; draft recommendations shared and iterated upon with participants; recommendations written up and report completed (December 2023–January 2024).

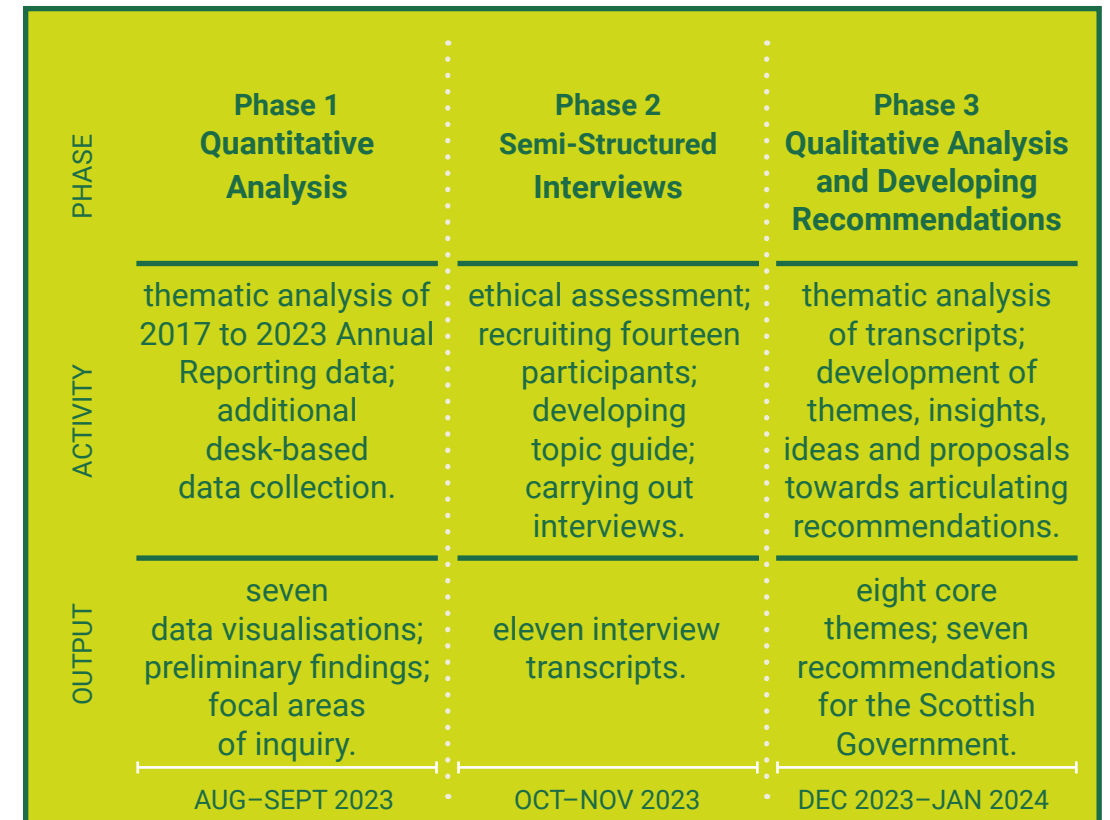


Figure 2. Understanding Participation Requests Research Approach (diagram). 2023. Cara Broadley.

Quantitative Analysis

In phase 1 six sets of Annual Reporting data collected from Public Service Authorities from 2017–18 to 2022–2023 were analysed. The core focus of this analysis was to understand overall patterns and gaps within Participation Requests, and considered the following breakdowns:

- Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD);
- Participation Requests by local authority area;
- Participation Requests by Public Service Authority type;
- Rural-urban analysis of Participation Request activity;
- Geographic patterns in the distribution of Participation Requests, including any notable hot- or cold-spots;
- Any pattern in the data relating to outcomes.

Findings generated in phase 1 of the research were then translated into a set of seven visualisations with accompanying statistical inferences drawn and presented.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

In phase 2 a series of eleven semi-structured interviews with fourteen representatives from Public Service Authorities and Community Participation Bodies were undertaken. An Interview Topic Guide (Appendix 1) was created, integrating questions and prompts derived from phase 1 of quantitative analysis. This was shared and iterated upon with The Community Empowerment Team at the Scottish Government to ensure that relevant issues concerning the promotion, reach, development, submission, handling, outcomes, and impact of Participation Requests were included in the interview questions. Interviews took place remotely through Microsoft Teams or Zoom, and in person, where time and resources allowed. Following each interview, audio recordings were transcribed by the researcher. During transcription, details that might identify participants were removed. After transcription each audio recording was securely destroyed and not used directly in the research.

In phase 3 the researcher carried out a stage of thematic analysis to code insights from within and across the interview transcripts, to be presented in narrative format for project reporting. Recommendations were drawn from themes where key issues were explored extensively by participants, and where ideas and proposals were put forward as opportunities for improvement. Draft recommendations were shared with participants as a form of member checking, before being written up alongside potential strategies for implementation.

Research Ethics

The ethical implications arising from the research were carefully considered through the support of the Glasgow School of Art's Research Office and in line with associated policies on good conduct in research. Working with the Scottish Government, a Data Sharing Agreement was drawn up to allow for the secure transfer of Annual Reporting Data to the researcher for analysis. [Glasgow School of Art's Research & Knowledge Exchange Ethics Policy](#) and [Data Protection Policy](#) were complied with at all times. The research obtained institutional ethical approval and produced a comprehensive Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 2) and Participant Consent Form (Appendix 3).

Participant Recruitment

A range of representatives from both Community Participation Bodies and Public Service Authorities were invited to take part in the research. The researcher drew from their own networks established through Social Studios to make direct contact by email, in addition to inviting participants introduced by the Scottish Government and through Public Service Authority website contact forms. Due to the limited number of Participation Requests that have been submitted since 2017 and in seeking to engage with a broad cross-section of users based on their diverse experiences and unique perspectives, purposive sampling was adopted.

Email invitations were sent to a total of twenty Public Service Authorities and Community Participation Bodies. Those reporting Participation Request activity within the 2022–2023 reporting cycle were invited as a means of understanding Public Service Authorities experiences of the legislation seven years since its introduction and Community Participation Bodies' awareness, motivations, and achievement of outcomes. To promote reflections on the value and benefits of Participation Requests, changes to processes and perceptions, and their impacts over time, a further group of Public Service Authorities and Community Participation Bodies with longer-term experience of Participation Requests were also invited to participate. Participation Request users within these two broad groups were characterised by diversity with regard to their geographic location, urban and rural profile, Public Service Authority type, and in relation to Participation Requests that span a broad range of outcomes. Fourteen Public Service Authority and Community Participation Body representatives responded to the call for participation. A low response rate from Community Participation Bodies led to an imbalance of Participation Request user groups across the eleven interviews, comprising three Community Participation Bodies (Participants 1–6) and eight Public Service Authorities (six local authorities and two NHS boards – Participants 7–14).

It is important to note that as the scope of this research is to explore how insights pertaining to the quantitative analysis patterns and gaps are manifest in the practice and implementation of Participation Requests, the interview findings are not deemed representative of all Participation Request users at a national scale. The interviews, however, are significant in linking the quantitative findings to lived experiences and opportunities for improvement.

Analysis and Findings

Annual Reporting data and semi-structured interview transcripts were analysed to foreground a series of findings and seven accompanying visualisations outlining local and national patterns and gaps, and a set of eight key themes and insights providing in-depth insight into the implementation of Participation Requests.

Quantifying Participation Request Activity

Initial quantitative analysis began with a translation of the 2017 to 2023 Annual Reporting data into a large-format hand-drawn *analogue spreadsheet* (Appendix 4) to re-present reporting figures and identify emerging patterns from within digital documents. This process highlighted inconsistencies and gaps where Participation Requests had not been directly reported to the Scottish Government. A subsequent additional phase of secondary data collection was carried out through desk research. Here the researcher systematically searched the websites of all eligible Public Service Authorities to locate further details of received and granted Participation Requests. Such details were added to the analogue spreadsheet accordingly.

Public Service Authorities

The analysis of data shown in Figure 3 determined that 63% of Participation Requests received by Public Service Authorities have been granted.

Of the 77 Public Service Authorities eligible to receive Participation Requests, 69% have not reported any submissions.

91% of Participation Requests have been received by local authorities; 8% to NHS boards, and 1% to other Public Service Authorities.

These findings raise questions surrounding the internal and external promotion of Participation Requests, the extent to which they are perceived as a flexible framework for public service decision-making; and broader questions around the role and capacity of local authorities.

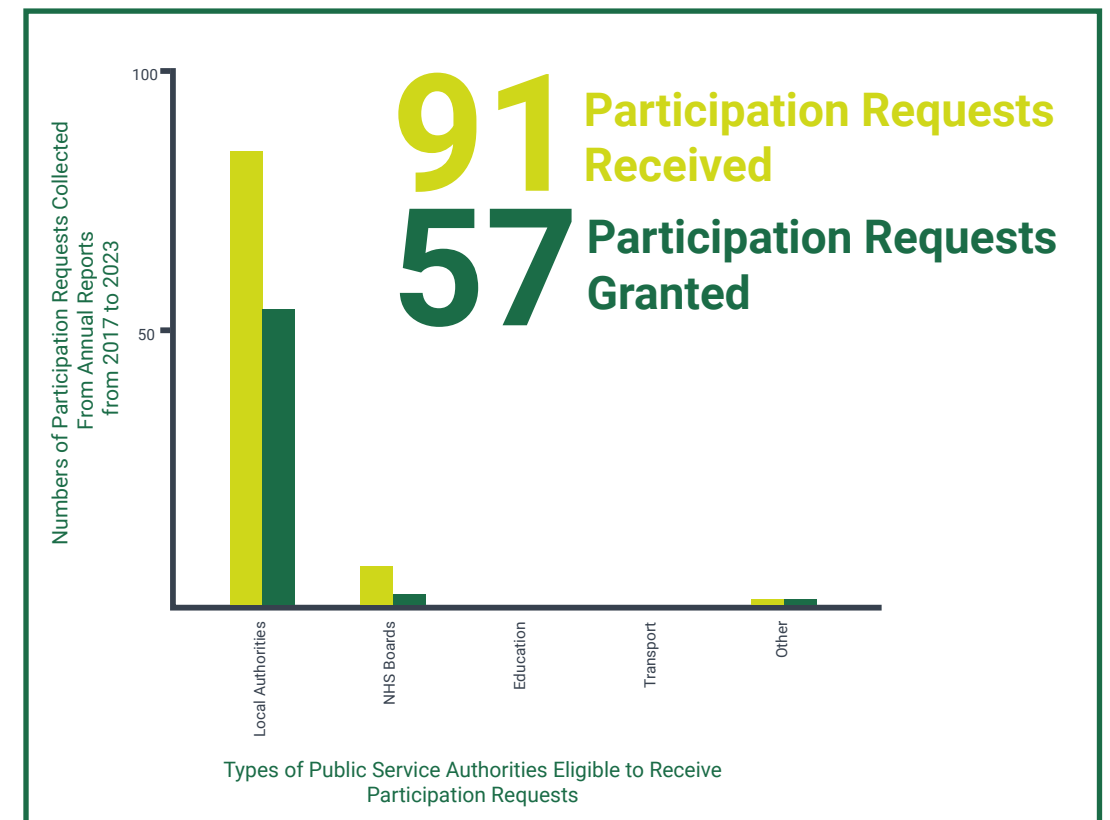


Figure 3. Number of Participation Requests Received and Granted by Public Service Authorities from 2017 to 2023 (chart). 2023. Cara Broadley.

Participation Request Activity at Local Levels

Figure 4 evidences that 63% of Scotland’s local authorities have reported receiving Participation Requests, with 65% of Participation Requests received by local authorities being granted.

In addition, 49% of Participation Requests received by local authorities have been spread across four local authorities.

While two of these local authorities represent Scotland’s two largest cities and have the highest populations; the remaining two cover larger geographies with a mixture of rural and urban areas, and have significantly smaller populations. This raises further questions surrounding Public Service Authorities’ perceptions and practices of Participation Requests in distinct regions.

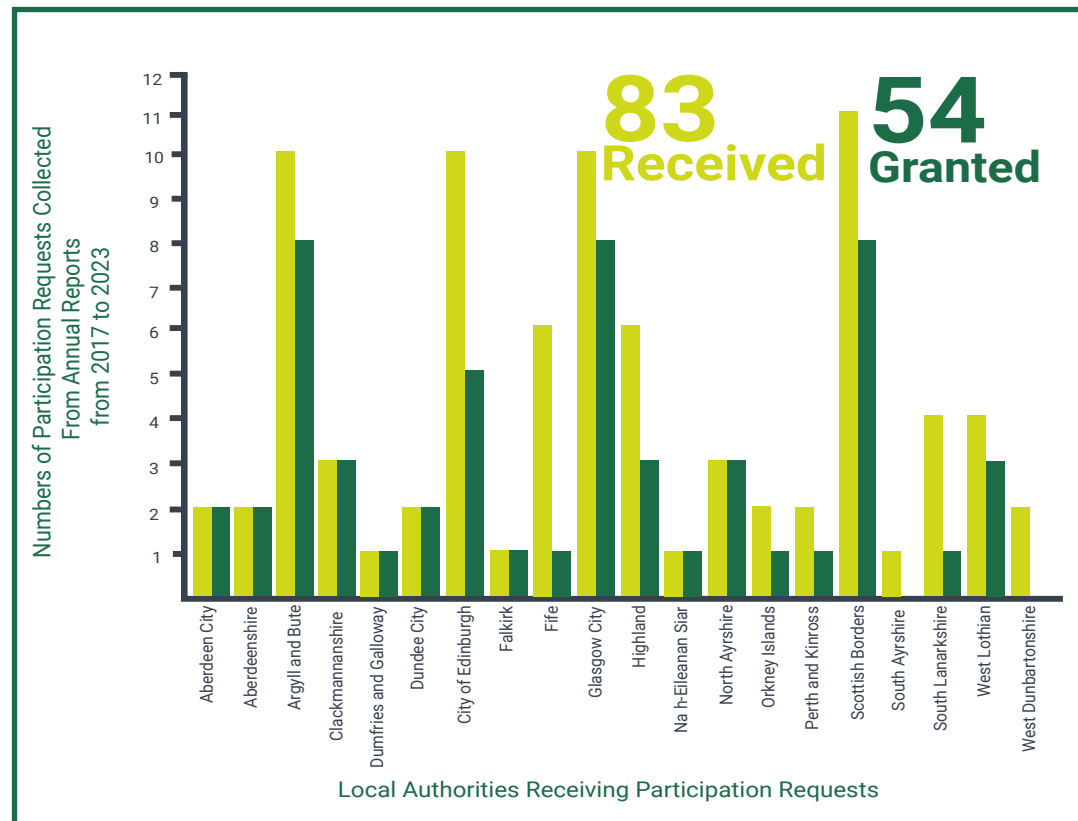


Figure 4. Number of Participation Requests Received and Granted by Local Authorities from 2017 to 2023 (chart). 2023. Cara Broadley.

Participation Request activity can thus be quantified as the cumulative number of Participation Requests both received and granted by each Public Service Authority since the introduction of the legislation in 2017.

In addition to ranking local authorities based on PR activity, Figure 5 shows the twelve local authorities that have yet to receive a Participation Request.

Investigation of each local authority is outwith the scope of this research, but quantitative analysis and additional desk research foregrounded participants to engage with in phase 2’s semi-structured interviews.

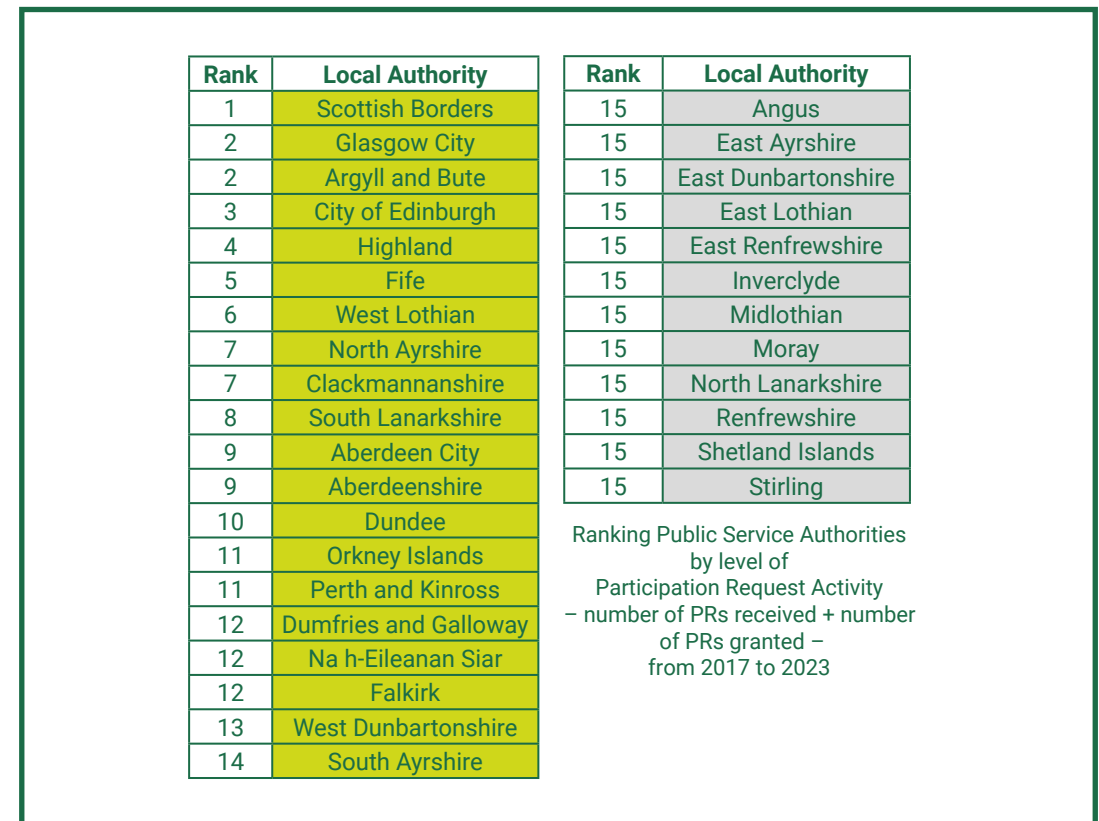


Figure 5. Ranking Local Authorities by Level of Participation Request Activity from 2017 to 2023 (table). 2023. Cara Broadley.

Participation Requests Over Time

Figure 6 shows that the numbers of Participation Requests being received and granted increased by 37% and 47% respectively in year 2 of Annual Reporting. This upsurge represents the peak of Participation Request activity, possibly due the legislation gaining traction since the first year of its introduction. This peak, however, was followed by a sharp decline in activity, with the number of Participation Requests received reducing by 67%, and the number of Participation Requests granted reducing by 58% by the time of the 2020–2021 Annual Reporting period.

This decline runs in parallel with the Covid-19 pandemic and associated periods of national lockdown. While the number of Participation Requests received has remained between nine and ten since 2020–2021, the number of these Participation Requests being granted has reduced further to three in 2022–2023.

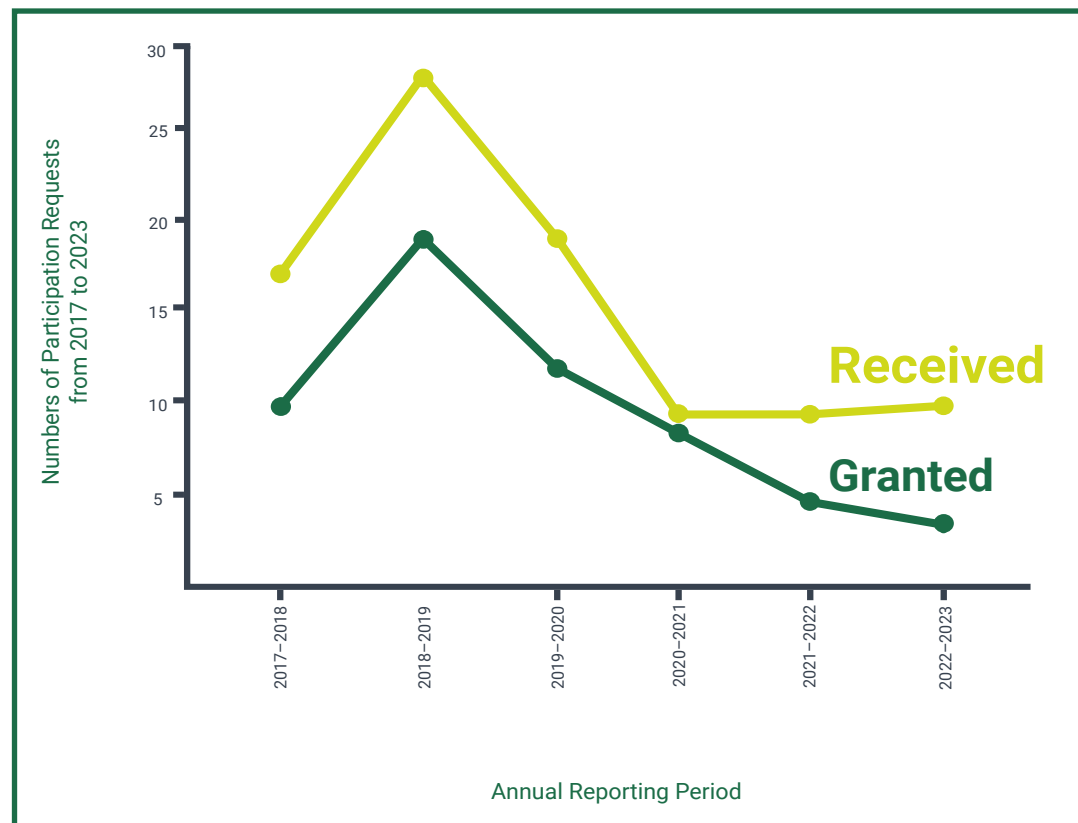


Figure 6. Numbers of Participation Requests Received and Granted Annually from 2017 to 2023 (chart). 2024. Cara Broadley.

Received Participation Requests by Community Participation Body Type

As shown in Figure 7, previous evaluations of Community Councils being the dominant Community Participation Body engaging with Participation Requests (McMillan et al., 2020: 1) were affirmed during analysis, with 66% of Participation Requests being submitted by Community Councils from 2017 to 2023. In submitting 8% of Participation Requests, Community Development Trusts have been less engaged. 29% of Participation Requests have been submitted by other Community Participation Bodies such as residents’ associations, community hubs, friends of groups, and action groups.

While it is evident from this analysis that a breadth of Community Participation Bodies are engaging with Participation Requests, additional work is needed to extend and diversify access and open up PRs to formally-organised groups.

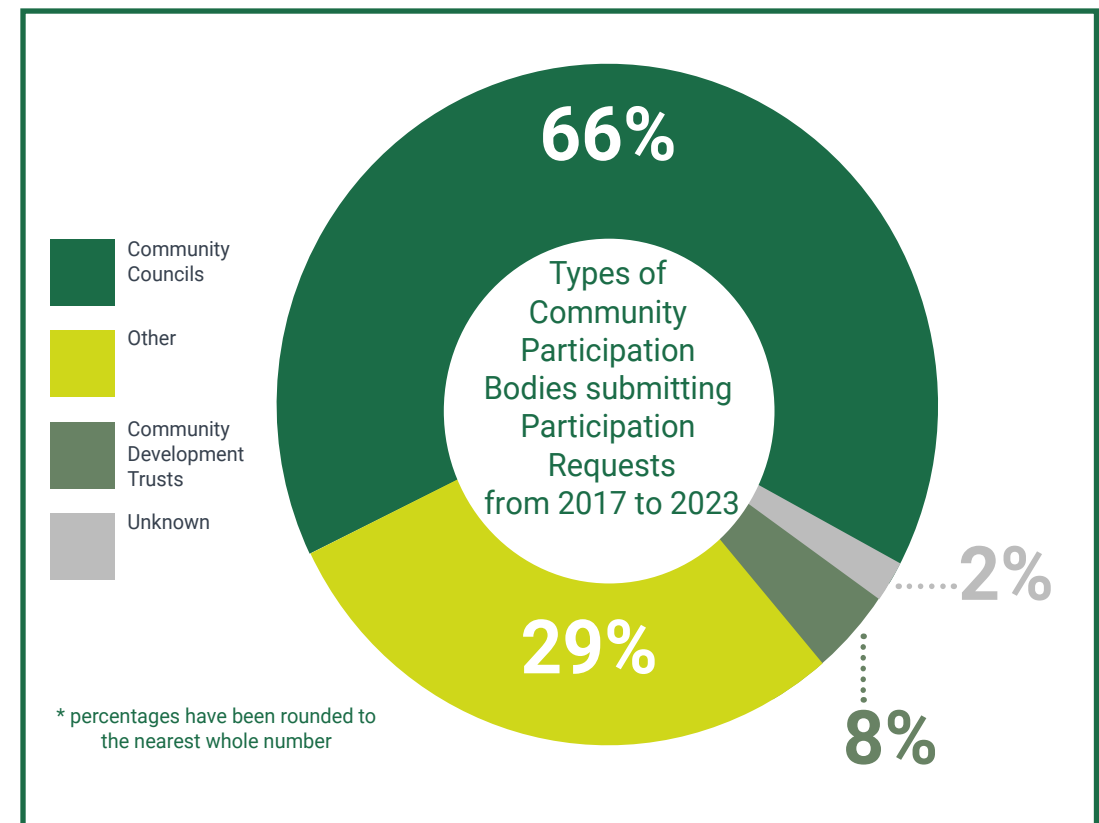


Figure 7. Types of Community Participation Bodies Submitting Participation Requests from 2017 to 2023 (chart). 2023. Cara Broadley.

Participation Requests and Inequalities

Geographic patterns emerging from the data at this level are limited by low levels of Participation Request activity – numbers are too small to draw concrete conclusions in this regard.

There is potential to use the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) to explore the socioeconomic profiles of Community Participation Bodies engaging with Participation Requests, but these approaches also present limitations around the representativeness of postcodes that require further exploration outwith the scope of this research. In prototyping SIMD as a unit of data analysis and framing Glasgow City Council’s Annual Reporting figures as a case study, Figure 8 goes some way to refuting the notion that Participation Requests are being submitted by more affluent Community Participation Bodies. These assessments, however, cannot be generalised broadly.

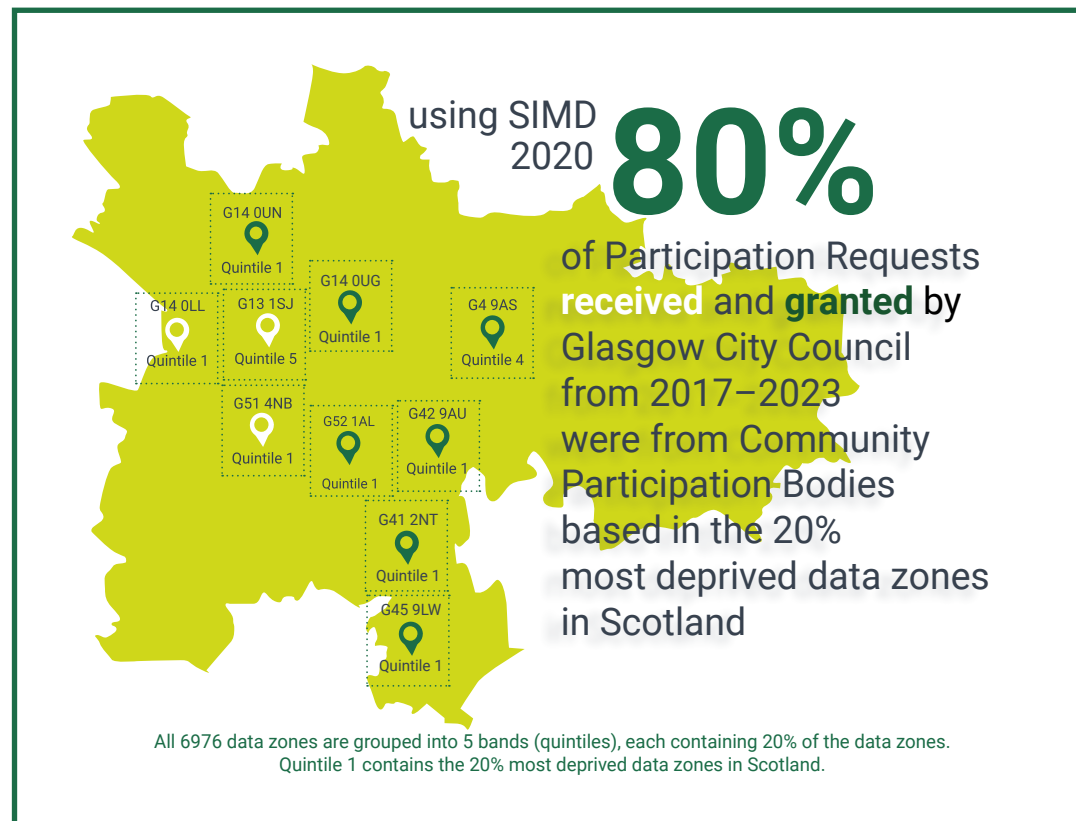


Figure 8. Community Participation Bodies Submitting Participation Requests to Glasgow City Council Mapped by SIMD 2020 (diagram). 2023. Cara Broadley.

Annual Reporting Practices

Analysis of Annual Reporting figures highlighted that since the introduction of Participation Requests, the rate of Annual Reports received by the Scottish Government is 48%.

As shown in Figure 9, this also revealed disparities across Public Service Authority groups. Although Transport networks have an average reporting rate of 89%, they have yet to receive a Participation Request. Conversely, local authorities have received a significant majority of Participation Requests yet their average reporting rate is 50%.

Pointing towards variations in Annual Reporting practices across Public Service Authorities, it is therefore challenging to present or report upon the use and impact of Participation Requests at a national level based on quantitative data alone.

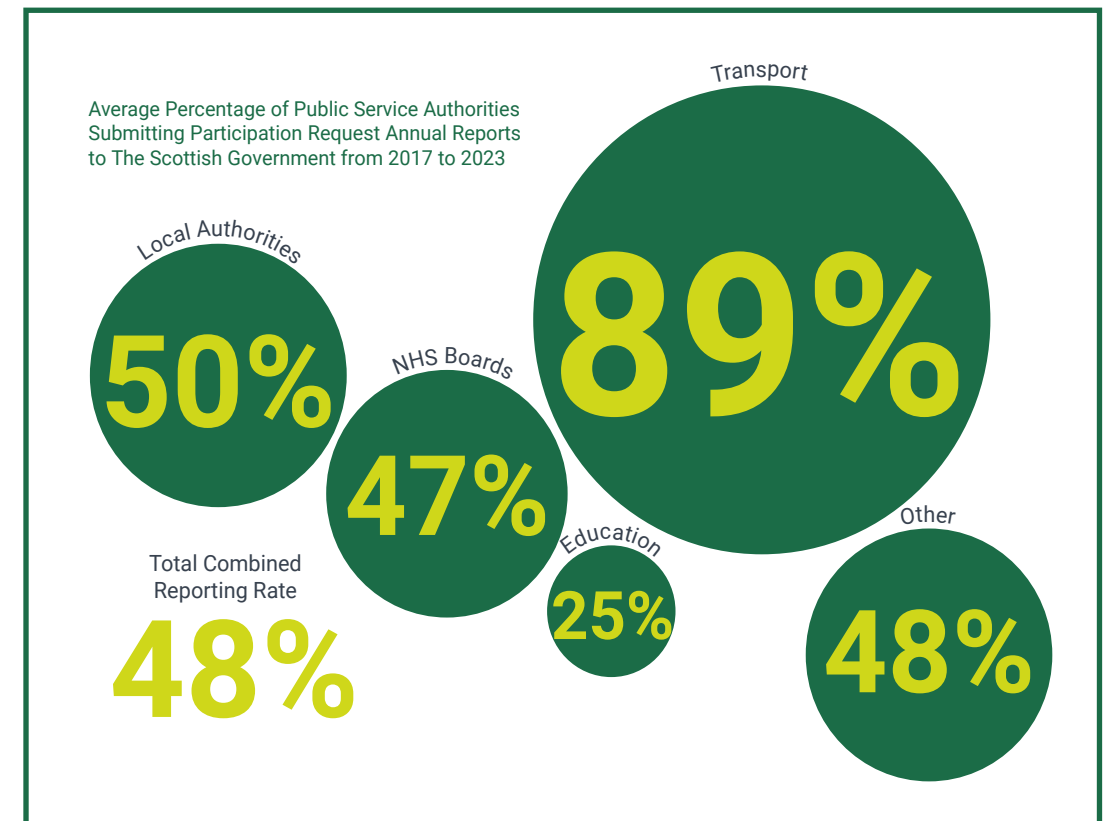


Figure 9. Average Percentage of Public Service Authorities Submitting Participation Request Annual Reports to the Scottish Government from 2017 to 2023 (diagram). 2023. Cara Broadley.

Qualitative Analysis of Participation Requests

Qualitative thematic analysis of eleven interview transcripts was undertaken to foreground the eight core themes shown in Figure 10, each with corresponding insights and informing subsequent recommendations.

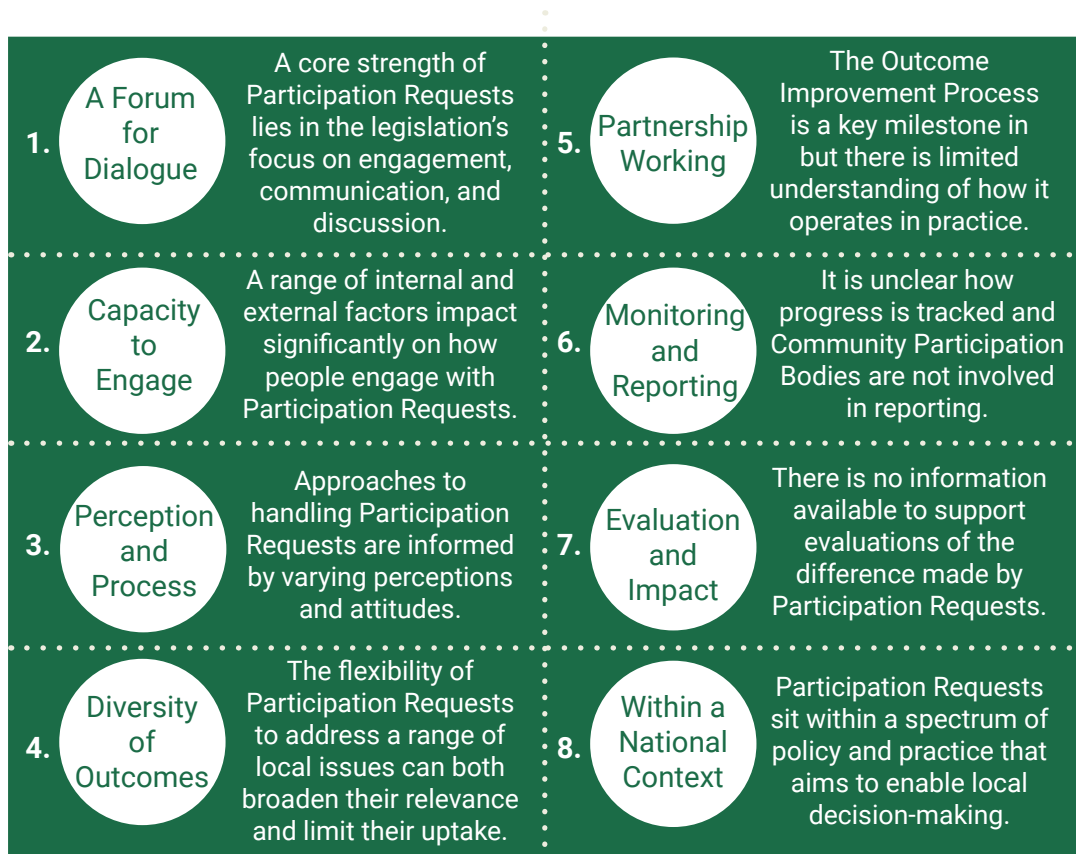


Figure 10. *Understanding Participation Requests Qualitative Analysis Themes* (diagram). 2023. Cara Broadley.

A Forum For Dialogue

While varying perceptions of the value of Participation Requests and how they are enacted were expressed in the interviews, the legislation's emphasis on creating a platform for community dialogue with Public Service Authorities was viewed as a positive feature by all participants.

“Even with ones that don't meet the criteria, there was still an effort to bring together the Community Council with the leaders from that area to be able to discuss the issues and create a space for listening.” Participant 7

Discussion around the strengths and weaknesses of the formal nature of Participation Requests were prevalent across the interviews. Some Public Service Authority participants took the view that Participation Requests' legislative roots contribute to curtailing public engagement, with communities often favouring informal approaches.

“Most communities don't work very formally and most people don't work very formally. I think they would much rather just have a nice chat, a nice conversation, and not get into the detail of 'are we a community body', 'that meets this certain bit of the legislation' and 'did we fill in this bit?'.” Participant 8

At the same time, both Public Service Authority and Community Participation Body participants highlighted the formal approach as providing the necessary legitimacy to support credible community-led decision-making, and a meaningful framework to foreground lived experience as a driver of service re-design.

“As placemaking is developing more and more in our area, a lot of stuff is coming naturally from communities, rather than from a formal approach. With the Participation Requests that we have had, when we've sat down with the group to have a conversation and go over the application, they've said we want to go through the proper formal process as they see that as very much is the right way to do it.” Participant 9

“They set up this massive meeting, and they gave us this agenda and they said 'you have to tell us what you've done so far, and why you think a Participation Request is important'. They gave us all these questions and every service manager in the local authority was invited. When we did the presentation to all these big service managers we used this real lived experience to show that we weren't just moaning, but to show the impact and that something needs to be done.” Participant 1

Some Public Service Authorities reported instances in which early discussion had resulted in issues being resolved without the need for a Participation Request being submitted. Others highlighted that informal contact between Community Participation Bodies and Public Service

Authorities had led to better shared understandings of issues and outcomes prior to Participation Request submission, and therefore, a positive working relationship and achievement of outcomes throughout the Outcome Improvement Process. Reflection on these examples led Public Service Authority participants to consider how such initial contact and early discussion could be encouraged.

“We should have a part in the legislation that says ‘councils must reach out to groups initially’, and it should be written as a window of time, to have informal discussions to work out clearly and unequivocally what the groups want to influence. If you read the legislation clearly, it does mention informal chats, but the onus is put on the communities to do that.”
Participant 7

Such informal resolution was viewed by some Public Service Authority participants as preferable to the submission of a Participation Request as it provides opportunities to learn about the Community Participation Body’s real needs and aspirations; flags up previous forms of engagement and their effectiveness or failures; enables considerations of the most appropriate approach to pursue, within and beyond Participation Requests; and helps manage expectations of the process and outcomes on both sides. Participants agreed that there is a need to understand and capture the Community Participation Body’s experiences of these issues from the offset of the Participation Request inquiry, and to raise their awareness of the Public Service Authority’s capacity and constraints.

“There should be some onus on the group to have looked at what engagements already are underway and see if we can actually affect change through that route and not bypass it. It would at least be good to have an explanation of why the group chose not to or couldn’t, because then that would help us design our engagement effectively.”
Participant 10

Capacity to Engage

Reflecting on their experiences of submitting and handling Participation Requests and being involved in the Outcome Improvement Process, participants highlighted a range of factors that have impacted upon their capacity to engage. Two participating Community Participation Bodies were composed of Community Councillors, each with long-standing knowledge and experience of the social, cultural, and political context of their local areas and policy opportunities; skills and approaches to communicate issues and needs; and extensive networks and connections to local authority Officers, Elected Members, and MSPs, and crucially, their broader communities.

“We made a poster with a QR code on it and we did a survey. We got over 2000 responses. We’ve done interviews and held development sessions with all the local groups. We always try to be transparent and get the people behind us. I think our credibility stands well because we’ve been involved in the local area for a long time, and because the Community Empowerment Act was just out, we got the Participation Request accepted quite easily.”
Participant 3

The remaining Community Participation Body was a member-led organisation who had been signposted by external organisations to Participation Requests and supported by internal staff to engage with the legislation, produce their request, and work in partnership with a Public Service Authority throughout the Outcome Improvement Process. Public Service Authorities highlighted pragmatic approaches to supporting Community Participation Bodies throughout the process, including assisting them to construct the Participation Request to meet the eligibility criteria and framing outcomes that are both meaningful and achievable.

“We’ve given an awful lot of leeway to some of the groups because there is a skill in completing the form and answering the questions. Some of the groups, it’s absolutely their bag and they’ve got the capacity to do that – but not everyone has. We have validated and agreed some Participation Requests which, if you read them, you’d think that they’re really shoddy. We’re not going to penalise a group because they can’t put together a good PR, because we understand what it is that they want.”
Participant 9

Indicative of a misalignment between Participation Request policy and practice, one Community Participation Body participant noted that while the Public Service Authority's initial reference to the intricacies of the legislation had stalled their Participation Request's progress, the willingness and cooperation of local authority Officers assigned to the Participation Request has enabled them to take mutual action.

"We were slowed down by the lack of the willingness of the council to address the issues that we brought up and we've had to take it in our own hands to get that, we've had to push to get the help that we need to complete it. It's down to teamwork. We couldn't do it without the council officers. We tell them what we're wanting and then we come to an agreement. It's different when you've got council officials, and they're quoting all these rules to you. Draconian is not the word." Participant 3

Upon explaining that the Participation Request process is detailed fully online, one Public Service Authority participant reflected upon the assumption that communities are proactive and considered the need for additional signposting. Recalling issues of formality, another Public Service Authority participant maintained that if Community Participation Bodies encounter challenges of access during the initial stage and engaging with the written form, it is possible that Participation Requests are not the most appropriate route for participation.

"It all has to be done through the form, although it is very basic, it's not complicated at all. If people aren't comfortable putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard, then they really have to think about what they're getting themselves into." Participant 11

These views concerning the capacity of communities and the accessibility of Participation Requests underline issues of equalities and inclusivity within Participation Request legislation. Some Public Service Authority participants explicitly emphasised the onus on Public Service Authorities to centre the voices and needs of under-represented people and communities, and that Participation Requests should be flexible enough to be applied in the cases where they are most needed, with their core principles being embedded in good practices of community engagement.

"We're supposed to make sure that we are delivering our services to the areas of greatest need, where there's poverty or there's addiction, and it tends to be that these are also the areas that don't have strong Community Councils. Participation Requests are driven by a more articulate community that wants something particular for them. I feel it under balances what you're supposed to be doing and doesn't help the groups with less expertise or stamina." Participant 10

"We're moving towards a paradigm shift that's more about going into communities and saying 'what do you need from us? What are the things that don't work for you or that could be improved for you?'. We should almost be creating Participation Requests internally and making that happen with the conduits back to the community." Participant 12

Prior evaluations recommend ways to enhance the reach, inclusivity, and interpretation of Participation Requests (Broadley and Dixon, 2022; McMillan et al., 2020; Paterson, 2018; Plotnikova and Bennett, 2018), and a need to address the relationship between Participation Requests and inequalities remains. However, as Community Participation Body participants did not report any significant challenges of awareness or understanding, it is not possible to make further assessments of the accessibility of Participation Requests based on the interview data.

A crucial area of discussion across the interviews concerned the resources available to and required by Public Service Authorities to effectively handle Participation Requests. Some Public Service Authorities reflected that despite their expectations of Participation Requests requiring extensive and constant attention, low numbers of submissions have meant that this has not been necessary. These topics often led participants to reflect upon marketing and promotion practices, with all Public Service Authorities noting that they do not actively encourage Participation Requests. This rationale could be thought of as conserving and more appropriately deploying public resources.

"It's more of a reactive thing where community groups have got to come to us, so why would we be promoting them on the basis that we're going to have to spend some money or take some time away from something else to take them forward?" Participant 8

One Public Service Authority participant recounted an early experience of a granted Participation Request and their desire to show others how well they responded to the request and enabled the right outcomes to be delivered, but at the same time, they emphasised their limited resources to sustain such good practice.

“We threw the whole kitchen sink at it. We were keen to demonstrate that we can do this and we can do this well, but it wasn’t practical when we reviewed it that we would be able to do that at scale. If we had been inundated it wouldn’t be practical. We just don’t have the resources and the cash to sustain that.” Participant 7

A further point raised by Participant 8 was that since 2017, Public Service Authorities dealing with Participation Requests have undergone several shifts and changes of personnel, resulting in challenges surrounding organisational memory. Such dialogue suggests the need for updated guidance for Public Service Authorities, as well as further refreshed presentation and training to support Public Service Authorities at all levels to understand, review, and implement Participation Requests.

Perception and Process

Throughout the interviews, Public Service Authorities’ varying perceptions of and attitudes towards the legislation were apparent, often appearing to have a significant impact upon their approaches to engaging with Participation Requests. All Public Service Authority participants were positioned as the first point-of-contact for Participation Requests, and as part of this role, some demonstrated a strong drive to support communities as their key priority, and honing skills of listening, being empathic, and diplomacy throughout, as well as an ability to connect with and support broader Public Service Authority staff to work with communities.

“What you’ve got is a person who’s making sure that it’s complied with and knows the legislation well enough. It’s also about the quality of the interactions and the motivational aspect of it. My job is trying to keep busy officers interested and ensure that they can see the benefits of it. I often have to coach the internal staff and say ‘you’re going to have to trust these people and really listen to them’.” Participant 7

At the same time, one Community Participation Body participant shared their experience of a challenging Participation Request and the tensions and resistance encountered when engaging with the Public Service Authority.

“What needs to change is the attitude behaviour of the staff in the public bodies, the lack of understanding of what’s involved. You can be blocked at an early level. There’s somebody there who is a purely a gatekeeper and they can stop it going any further. There was a lack of respect and a lack of interest. It feels like they think we’re just a nuisance.” Participant 6

The notion of power-sharing was a feature throughout the interviews, with some participants discussing links between the core aims of the Participation Request and how this is manifest in practice, and others alluding to power imbalances when highlighting challenges and barriers to Participation Request success. One Community Participation Body participant recalled foregrounding the Public Service Authority’s responsibility and communities’ rights to engage with Participation Requests, and in doing so, how this engagement can shape the legislation’s efficacy.

“I remember one manager saying to me ‘it’s not got any teeth and it doesn’t mean anything’ and we were really clear to point out that a Participation Request has been made under the Community Empowerment Act and so their obligation is to do something about it. It’s up to them if they choose that its got no teeth or not. How they respond is where the power is.” Participant 1

Three Public Service Authorities cited low numbers of Participation Request submissions as an indicator of successful engagement approaches already being in place and high levels of community satisfaction. One Public Service Authority participant maintained that Participation Requests represent failures of local empowerment, and are capable of being exploited by Community Participation Bodies.

“The Participation Request is the final marker where if we’ve not been able to have a process in place before then, the community bodies will force our hand to show that they are best placed to design and deliver services for themselves.” Participant 8

Participation Requests were positioned by these Public Service Authorities as unnecessary additional legislation that has been imposed with little consideration for implementation. A further Public Service Authority participant, however, recognised that often the individual designated as the first point-of-contact has limited power to influence the Participation Request decision and approach, and that awareness, understanding, and buy-in from Public Service Authority leaders is an essential enabler of community empowerment.

“We need board members and managers to understand what empowering our communities is – they’re the ones that are going to need to give up the power to them. Us in the middle – we just end up looking bad because we’re making promises that aren’t being carried out.”

Participant 12

Public Service Authority participants described the internal infrastructure established in their organisations to manage Participation Request submissions. Many such systems had been established through extensive consideration and planning, only to be partially used due to low levels of Participation Request activity. The development of local approaches to handle Participation Requests was highlighted by all Public Service Authority participants, with systems and approaches being aligned to existing frameworks and personnel, as well as tailored forms of guidance bespoke to particular regions and geographies.

“We agree them when we can, but perhaps that’s because as a small local authority covering a large rural area, we are very open to working with communities.”

Participant 9

“With our local authority being very small, it’s not difficult for bodies like Community Councils to get in touch with us, but chances are they know the person individually and they’ll just directly contact us. We try to put as few barriers in place as possible.”

Participant 13

“People’s issues are different. We just have to try and adapt to these and not use that kind of broad stroke of ‘well, this is what we do and this is how it happens across our local authority’. It just doesn’t work.”

Participant 14

For some Public Service Authorities, the ambition of Participation Requests and the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015) more broadly were framed as having synergy with their attitudes and approaches to public service provision and so integrating Participation Requests was a relatively simple process. One Public Service Authority participant also questioned whether there could be a case for actively flagging up Participation Requests as opportunities for communities to inform decisions.

“Our ethos is communicating, listening, and improving, so I felt it was really good that we were going to be able to have people come to services and challenging us around improvements. That’s what we’ve ended up doing as part of our local process. I almost wondered whether we should go down a bit of a route of almost enforcing Participation Requests, not in a negative way but if we saw there was an opportunity to say, ‘okay, how could we support this group to present this to the service?’”

Participant 12

Public Service Authorities also noted the value of digital modes of engagement, and the potential to consider how Participation Requests can make use of the breadth and persistence of approaches that gained traction during the Covid-19 pandemic. These ideas also highlighted a possible correlation between increased use of and access to social media, stronger communication between Public Service Authorities and communities, quicker decision-making and service improvement, and low numbers and a subsequent further reduction since 2020 in the need for the formal and often time-consuming approaches of Participation Requests.

“If someone wants to communicate with us, they simply put something on our Facebook. That’s how we get very directly involved with all sorts of people and we’ve already got those kinds of channels.”

Participant 13

Developing these ideas, three Public Service Authority participants acknowledged the capacity of social media to enhance the visibility of public services, and the tendency for local councillors to be seen, recognised, and engaged with in smaller local authorities. This links to considerations of how online methods could be used alongside Participation Request legislation to extend access and inclusion, and provide multiple flexible engagement pathways.

“We used to have these town hall meetings and you would turn up and hope somebody else will come. We need to be a lot more flexible about things like online engagement surveys. Participation Requests don’t account for these post-Covid ways of engaging with communities. We should be looking at how we engage more proactively through digital means.” Participant 13

Diversity of Outcomes

Discussing a range of outcomes as the focal point of Participation Requests, Community Participation Bodies and Public Service Authorities noted the openness and flexibility of Participation Requests as both a strength that broadens the scope, relevance, and potential applications of the legislation; and a limitation that can lead to ambiguous outcomes that are challenging to define, achieve, and evidence.

One Public Service Authority participant emphasised the dominance of Participation Requests submitted and granted that focus on infrastructural and transport issues, and correlated this with the surrounding geography and the needs of local people.

“I think that’s just a general kind of gripe or issue that people have. On the islands in particular, you only just have to go off the main road and you’re on a single track road right away. That’s the stuff that people are having issues with almost every day, so that’s the stuff that floats up to the top.”

Participant 14

Such a framing of Participation Requests as an approach to delivering material improvements was developed by a second Public Service Authority participant, whilst highlighting alternative, and in their view preferable, approaches for addressing local issues.

“The main issues that people like to talk about are roads, lighting, bins, litter, and potholes – most Participation Requests are within that locus. That’s why we’ve got the Neighbourhood Liaison Team as a single point-of-contact within each ward.” Participant 8

Participation Requests that directly address changes to existing services were deemed by one Public Service Authority participant as being an effective use of the legislation, as in opening up dialogue and understanding amongst service providers and service users, they create the conditions for responsive service improvement and meaningful outcomes.

“We feel that actually the best engagement that we’ve seen through this is when communities talk directly to the services, not to the management, who are higher up but don’t really know what the day-to-day service is looking at.” Participant 12

In parallel to sharing examples of Participation Requests that result in tangible incremental improvements to community services, one Community Participation Body participant shared their experience of harnessing the legislation as a route to request further extensive locality planning across their area. While noting the time, resources, and energy required to sustain a Participation Request focused on complex issues and instigating structural transformation, the Community Participation Body highlighted their aspirations for longer-term outcomes and the impact that their Participation Request could have for local people.

“If we get these outcomes, if we can make these changes and improvements to local services, it’ll really give people hope.” Participant 3

Community Participation Bodies making use of Participation Requests to have extensive involvement in Public Service Authority decision-making structures was recognised as a valid and beneficial form of participation, with many positive benefits such as improved relationships and enhanced transparency and accountability.

“We wanted to make things better, but we wanted to work closely with the local authority to make that happen. We wanted to know what we could do as an organisation to help them make those improvements. They said come and be on the board, and let’s look at how we can make things better.” Participant 1

Four Public Service Authority participants discussed Participation Requests being refused on the grounds that Community Participation Bodies' requests for involvement in service decision-making are outwith the remit of the legislation. It was also noted that some requests for inclusion in confidential Public Service Authority matters or legal constraints have not been well received by Community Participation Bodies, resulting in longer-term disagreements.

“They resorted to a Participation Request, and the improvements were made – the driver behind that was the fact that they had tried and failed to communicate with the relevant service, so that was exactly what the Act was meant to be doing. The other one was a bit different. They wanted to make improvements and due to the small population, we have never yet managed to justify the expenditure. It has been through a number of planning stages and we are now writing an outline business case, and the community wanted to be involved in that as a writer rather than as a consultee.”

Participant 9

It was apparent that Public Service Authority participants each had varying perceptions of the capacity and constraints of Participation Requests and the nature of outcomes that could be addressed. A key perspective of five Public Service Authority participants was the notion that Participation Requests' primary purpose is to enable community groups to become directly involved in service provision and delivery. It is therefore possible that this misconception has influenced internal attitudes and practices.

“I would say communities would have to think long and hard about whether they can provide a better service in place of the council. There's already a service that is being provided, albeit not a very good one, but services are provided. Why would a community body want to take on that?”

Participant 11

“The whole point I would think is that if you're going to find a gap in service or something that you can do better, then they're going to have to carry on in the longer term, not just you know, six months down the line.”

Participant 8

Public Service Authorities' awareness and understanding of Participation Requests' function as a forum for community empowerment was critiqued extensively by one Community Participation Body participant. In describing their Participation Request's aim to contribute lived experience to service decision-making, they detailed the challenges of agreeing mutually beneficial outcomes.

“They asked us what we could offer since we didn't deliver services, so we explained that we represented the community and were here to highlight the issues that we want to tackle, and they said 'you're just here to take potshots at us', and we said 'no, we're going to look at solutions and jointly make a decision,' and there was silence.”

Participant 6

Reflecting on Participation Requests that have been refused on the grounds that alternative engagement approaches are already established, one Public Service Authority expressed a need to articulate the added value of Participation Requests. This point was also alluded to by a second Public Service Authority participant, who noted that Participation Requests' contributions to service improvement can be seen as a preventative approach to receiving complaints, and that this is of benefit to Public Service Authorities.

“The reason we've refused certain Participation Requests is because communities already have opportunities to comment on planning matters and we would need to know what communities are providing that adds value here.”

Participant 11

Four Public Service Authority participants also considered how current definitions and framings of outcomes within the legislation and guidance could be revised to enhance clarity, and in turn, influence the Outcome Improvement Process and more effective modes of partnership working.

“I think Participation Requests could focus on the sustainability of services. If a community said 'we can work with you to pool our resources and potentially unlock more resources, different resources, and make things better', that really could be of benefit to the council and public services.”

Participant 2

Partnership Working

The Outcome Improvement Process was foregrounded throughout the interviews as a key stage or milestone of Participation Requests. One Community Participation Body participant explained how they have appreciated the opportunity to work closely with Public Service Authority officers through the Outcome Improvement Process to coordinate timescales and processes together and analyse emerging data and insight from surrounding communities. Through highlighting experiences of creating positive working relationships, one Public Service Authority participant connected Participation Request legislation to reinforcing the shared benefits of co-production.

“I think Participation Requests are good because they flag up that communities and public authorities can work together and should work together.” Participant 12

Participation Requests were discussed by all participants in relation to broader forms of community engagement. One Public Service Authority participant explained that in being located in a rural area, sustaining positive relationships with diverse communities is of priority and that the availability and promotion of multiple engagement approaches can open up these opportunities. Through this, they also considered a possible link between high levels of direct community engagement and low numbers of Participation Request submissions.

“There will always be people that will struggle to link into a local authority, and if Participation Requests can provide that then that’s brilliant, but I don’t think its on Participation Requests alone. We’ve had investment in community engagement officers and I think its really paying dividends. Whether its having any effect on why we haven’t had any Participation Request as we’ve come out of the pandemic, I don’t know...” Participant 9

Returning to perceptions of Participation Requests as a procedure for raising complaints, one Public Service Authority participant discussed a Participation Request in which effective outcomes were attributed to positive social dynamics and the active framing of the Participation Request by the Community Participation Body as a process of improvement.

“They genuinely wanted to make a difference, they genuinely wanted to make things better. They realised that this wouldn’t happen if they’d just said ‘the council are bad and we want to tell you how bad they are’. The people involved seemed to understand that the council have certain constraints. There was a real understanding where people were coming from, and they were all trying to do their best.” Participant 8

In parallel to this, Public Service Authorities acknowledged a number of Participation Requests in which partnership working had been extremely challenging to establish, recalling instances where Community Participation Bodies’ sense of ownership had been obstructive. While one participant highlighted that Public Service Authorities are held to account for taking action, a second maintained that Participation Requests enable Community Participation Bodies to enforce their participation.

“I suppose that’s the difficulty of the feedback loop, where you have to acknowledge what they’ve highlighted, and say that we’ve passed this on to the service providers. Are they going to act on it? Are they going to ignore it?” Participant 10

“Participation Requests are a backstop where if you’re not able to participate because the council aren’t doing something or allowing you to participate in making decisions, then you can force our hand.” Participant 8

Community Participation Body participants had varying levels of influence in determining the format and content of the Outcome Improvement Process. One Community Participation Body highlighted the ongoing challenges of their Participation Request surrounding a lack of communication, transparency, and action from the Public Service Authority, linking this to an Outcome Improvement Process being imposed upon them and little opportunities to shape discussions. Community Participation Bodies’ accompanying critiques of a lack of guidance around the definition, design, and delivery of the Outcome Improvement Process support Public Service Authority participants’ views of this process as a site for meaningful and equitable collaboration.

“We’ve come from the direction of this is what our community wants to improve – this is what they want and they want to work with us on it. The Outcome Improvement Process needs to be valued by both sides. If it’s not, then it’s failing. If it’s not meaningful to the community, it’ll feel like a tick-box exercise and it’ll need to be pulled back pretty quickly.” Participant 10

Such mechanisms for co-designing the Outcome Improvement Process were seen as essential requirements for Participation Requests both to align community empowerment legislation and implementation, and to ensure that the timescales, activities, milestones, and deliverables are mutually-agreed, interlinked with outcomes, and achievable.

“This community group kept bringing in new stuff and it was because we didn’t define the Outcome Improvement Process clearly in the first place. It was too late and too ambiguous and too open. The scope was too wide. We need to be more instructive, more prescriptive. It definitely needs to be broken down into a set of steps that take place.” Participant 7

Exemplifying the potential impact of co-designing the Outcome Improvement Process, one Community Participation Body participant recalled their use of a slide presentation to share with the Public Service Authority experiences of community support provision, foregrounding the local needs and aims central to the Participation Request. This led to a measurable set of objectives and actions to address in partnership. At the same time, two Public Service Authority participants detailed the challenges of negotiating with individuals who had used their involvement in eligible Community Participation Bodies to submit Participation Requests deemed to be driven by personal interests.

“Both Participation Requests we’ve received have been around the same issues and have been driven by one particular individual who is very passionate about their community having more of a voice.” Participant 10

While foregrounding the harnessing of Participation Request legislation, these practices have the potential to prevent diverse and inclusive engagement from across communities, and to progress Participation Requests that are not truly representative of local needs and aims.

Both Public Service Authority and Community Participation Body participants discussed a corresponding need to involve local communities more broadly in shaping and progressing Participation Requests.

“We’re pulling communities into locality discussions, not just one-to-one discussions. We’re not going to improve outcomes by only meeting the needs of one particularly vocal group.” Participant 8

“It’s important to know if Participation Requests are based on a whole community view – have they done surveys or a petition of the communities to show that there’s broad support behind the Participation Request?” Participant 7

Barriers to the success of Participation Requests were identified within the list of Public Service Authorities eligible to receive Participation Requests, as set out in the legislation. Reflecting on the position of local authorities as the Public Service Authority handling the most Participation Requests, one participant discussed public perceptions of different Public Service Authorities’ roles and capacities to drive community planning.

“The Local Government Act said that community planning was a council function, and then the Community Empowerment Act said it’s a council, police, NHS, fire, Scottish Enterprise function – they’re the partners that have to facilitate it. I get a sense that with the police and fire, if you were to put a Participation Request in to them, they would be like ‘what?’ The council seem to be seen as the community anchor body for the entire area, and for Participation Requests.” Participant 8

“The most challenging thing for us has been facilitating engagement where we can’t actually deliver the outcome as it’s been governed by a separate body.” Participant 10

Monitoring and Reporting

The extent to which Participation Requests are monitored and reported was a core element of the interviews, with Community Participation Body participants emphasising their own internal capabilities and informal approaches to track Participation Request progression towards outcomes.

Defining the conclusion of the Participation Request was noted as a key challenge by many participants, with Public Service Authorities highlighting Community Participation Bodies' desire for an open-ended process and the potential to introduce approaches to collectively identify indicators and criteria for measuring success.

“They wanted to keep the Outcome Improvement Process open so that at any given point in the future they could come back and say ‘as part of that Outcome Improvement Process you’ve committed to speaking to us.’ We have to take account of a range of opinions and our service planning, not who shouts the loudest.” Participant 10

“There’s no finality to it so it can rumble on and you don’t really know if you’ve got it right as you’ve never been too clear about that scope, and you don’t really understand fully what the bottom line is.” Participant 7

At the same time, one Community Participation Body participant explained that their Outcome Improvement Process was concluded by the Public Service Authority without any prior discussion or agreement that the outcomes had been achieved.

“It was unilaterally ended without our group having been given sight of the final end design for the service model, or seeing the final report.” Participant 6

Within these discussions, Public Service Authority participants recognised the varying approaches taken to adhere to the legislation’s requirement for Annual Reports to be created and disseminated. Limited guidance around the nature and purpose of Annual Reporting was noted alongside varying degrees of accountability and visibility of Participation Request reports within Public Service Authorities.

“We thought initially it was to be a kind of detailed report but it’s very short and to the point, and it means we don’t have to go through the council’s committee cycles and stuff like that to get things signed off.” Participant 13

“When the report comes round and we have a look at it, the community development team draft it, they put across to me, we look at it and then we will send that in and report it further up the line, just to say ‘this is the Annual Report on participation requests’.” Participant 14

When asked to comment on the volume of work required to complete the Annual Report, Public Service Authorities deemed this a relatively straightforward task, with one participant questioning the purpose and focus of reporting mechanisms. Such discussions prompted Public Service Authority participants to consider how Annual Reporting practices could be further formalised as a statutory requirement within the legislation, and the ways in which this could inform evaluations of Participation Requests’ impacts and benefits.

“I don’t think the admin burden is going to put people off encouraging it, but it might mean they just end up not writing all the reports or putting them online because there’s no sanction. If a piece of legislation isn’t working, you have to think why do I really need it? For whose benefit is the report? Is it purely to force someone to write it so that the Scottish Government knows it’s happening, or is it to show that there’s actually been a benefit the people on the ground who’ve got what they wanted?” Participant 8

Both Public Service Authority and Community Participation Body participants recognised opportunities to democratise reporting practices by enabling Community Participation Bodies to document and publish their Participation Request experiences, and considered the most appropriate methods for doing so.

“You’re supposed to report on the Outcome Improvement Process. You’re supposed to sit down with the group at the conclusion. There should be lots of reports that capture the communities’ experiences of it.” Participant 7

“How do you even capture that from the group? Do you ask them to write it down, because the Public Service Authority might say ‘yeah, that was great, we concluded that’, but the group may still feel that they weren’t able to take aspects of it forward. Who writes it, and who signs it off? We would be quite happy for them to issue a questionnaire to the group and to the Public Service Authority after it and see what their thoughts are and it could be very much focused on the process, and how improvements could be made.” Participant 10

Evaluation and Impact

These points underline gaps within legislation and guidance concerning how Participation Requests are evaluated. The absence of a strategy for evaluating the immediate and long-term impacts of Participation Requests prevents a realistic understanding of their benefits and value.

“The Annual Report that we prepare every year just says ‘how many have you approved, how many did you reject, was there an Outcome Improvement Process put in place’, but there’s not like a longer-term report to say ‘well, now that you’ve got that Outcome Improvement Process in place, what was improved? How much was it improved? Are the community happy with the improvement?’” Participant 8

“A lot of ours are ongoing things that we don’t envisage would come to an end, so for Outcome Improvement Process like that, should there be a formal Annual Report rather than just saying that’s what happened in the short term?” Participant 9

Public Service Authority participants’ reflections on evaluating Participation Request activity and outcomes suggest that practices currently employed are on an informal and ad-hoc basis, without dedicated resource or expertise to define and measure the difference made by Participation Requests.

“If it was left without any kind of monitoring and evaluation or just coming back, checking in from time to time that things are actually improving, I don’t think it’s going to work. Not really having gone down that route myself it’s quite hard to know, and I do think it’s difficult to measure the quality of service.” Participant 11

The extent to which Participation Requests could lead to lasting benefits for Public Service Authorities and communities was a focus of the interviews. One participant concluded that as in their organisation and particular geography Participation Requests have been used to make defined improvements to local services, such change is bounded and confined to individual and discrete outcomes.

“They’ve all been very localised. Once people get what they’re looking for, that’s it. They’ve got it and it stays like that. The benefit is short term, but it just continues on the longer term. Ours have all been about specific issues that have got an improvement and that’s it, everybody’s happy. To try and identify the long-term benefit, I think might be difficult.” Participant 14

Developing these ideas, the same participant recognised that meaningful change can take place at different levels and scales, and that there is a need to recognise both the cumulative impact of several Participation Requests across a local authority area, and how such ongoing improvements can inform public perceptions of service providers, and have a benefit for Public Service Authorities.

“There’s been enough of a change from each of the Participation Requests and that in itself is a benefit because it reduces issues being raised and complaints, or maybe people going to the press to highlight our failings. There’s a reputational benefit for the council.” Participant 14

Participation Request outcomes were also framed more broadly as having the capacity to improve relationships between Public Service Authorities and communities. This further highlights the need for evaluation to be embedded in the Outcome Improvement Process.

“A good outcome would be for communities to feel that they can trust the council more. What we want to build into that is how we can improve perceptions and relationships – how responsive were we; how communicative were we; how accepting were we; how approachable were we – we’re not just an entity, we’re an organisation that reaches out. I would rather see a process for evaluation Participation Requests than an appeals part.”

Participant 7

The need for an appeals mechanism was strongly advocated for by one Community Participation Body participant but further examination of this was outwith the scope of the inquiry. In reflecting on indicators of Community Participation Body satisfaction, one Public Service Authority participant noted the need to consider ways to capture and understand the additional unplanned outcomes and unintended consequences of Participation Requests.

“The group who were the happiest at the end of it never got what they wanted, but they actually felt that they’d been listened to and that various mitigations had been put in place. How could we have seen that would happen at the start of the process, and how do you even capture that from the group?”

Participant 10

Whilst these points affirm a distinction in perspectives regarding the immediate and longer-term implications of Participation Requests, in underlining the scope and flexibility of the legislation and the diversity of outcomes being sought by Community Participation Bodies through Participation Requests, they also reinforce a need to embed systematic processes of evaluating Participation Request activity and impact at local and national levels.

Public Service Authority participants also considered the operational elements of Participation Request evaluation.

“We ask communities if they feel able to influence service design and delivery, and those kinds of numbers may not change in a year, but maybe over five or ten years they will. If the Scottish Government put in a suite of indicators then the Public Service Authority and the Community Participation Body agree which indicators they’re going to measure over a certain time scale. That way it would be standardised across the country, but also give a bit of a focus for each individual Participation Request.”

Participant 8

“We ask communities at the outset ‘what is it you’re trying to achieve? How will you know you’ve achieved that?’, and then we try to keep track of the opportunities that have come out of the Participation Request. We should see evaluation as part of the Annual Report, have the service involved too, and then have it signed off by someone from the engagement team to show that it was appropriately handled. We always say that we put in a three month review to go back and we let management know, so that could be built in too as best practice.”

Participant 7

It should also be noted that while the point-of-contact within Public Service Authorities has oversight of the number of Participation Requests submitted, granted, and refused; the individuals and departments involved; and an understanding of the decision notice and outcomes achieved, as individual levels of knowledge vary across Scotland, there is a need to develop and embed robust approaches to handle and evaluate Participation Requests.

“When we’re looking at the outcomes achieved, the most important parts are not the number of how many were approved or accepted, it is the quality of outcome. I have the sense that the Community Participation Body thought this would be an avenue to force increased transport links and increased access to shops and services, which still hasn’t been delivered.”

Participant 8

In addition to enhancing a more equitable Participation Request process, evaluating and showcasing Participation Requests impact for Community Participation Bodies has the potential to enhance promotion and showcase their benefits to Public Service Authorities and to community groups across Scotland.

“It’s led to lots of participation. We’ve been promised a bigger budget for community-based services over the next three years, they’ve introduced a new participation and engagement team, and we now sit on the Board.”
Participant 1

Discussions of impact have been a significant element of the research in linking the qualitative interviews with the quantitative analysis of Annual Reporting data. The success and sustainability of the legislation therefore must account for the difference that has been made through the Participation Requests that have been granted.

Participation Requests in a National Context

A final theme was identified encompassing discussions of the broader landscape of policy and practice in which Participation Requests are located, and a need to enhance awareness and understanding of connections and distinctions for Public Service Authorities and Community Participation Bodies alike.

As highlighted across the previous themes, Participation Requests exist alongside a broad range of formal and informal approaches that strive to enable communities to have more understanding and influence over decisions that affect them, including complaints, feedback, freedom of information requests, whistle-blowing, asset-transfer requests, participatory budgeting, and co-production. Mapping out where Participation Requests sit as part of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015), as well as their relationship with broader national policies was defined as a priority to enhance access and understanding for both Community Participation Bodies and Public Service Authorities.

“We just need to be really careful that policy map is really clear, and we’re not confusing people with having overlapping pieces of legislation or saying ‘you can go down that route, or you can go down that route – they sort of achieve the same thing, but through a different way.’ That’s just confusing to people.”
Participant 9

In addition to clarifying where Participation Requests are situated on this spectrum and how their distinct features and benefits are manifest in practice, a key area of focus concerns how Participation Requests are linked to legislation to actively tackle societal inequalities.

“It’s about getting an understanding of what communities need and what matters to them, which is a huge thing at the moment in the council, particularly to address marginalisation and inclusivity, so it should be tied into equalities legislation.”
Participant 12

Mapping and linking Participation Requests’ unique features and capabilities could open up opportunities to strategically promote the legislation to groups experiencing particular issues in complex contexts, and to staff from across Public Service Authorities.

“I know there have been issues across Scotland with how they’ve been promoted, but I’m wondering if they could link in with our clinical partnership forums.”
Participant 12

“The Planning with People guidance has been renewed and I’m pretty sure it doesn’t mention the Community Empowerment Act or Participation Requests. This could be a way for boards to encourage listening to our communities and laying out expectations in its guidance of the conversations we could be having.”
Participant 13

Whilst several participants recognised Participation Requests' worthy intentions, some were keen to stress the Public Service Authority's autonomy to define appropriate engagement approaches for particular situations and contexts, and for the Scottish Government to be accepting of local variations in approach.

“It's a way of trying to force us down one route of engaging with communities a bit like participatory budgeting, whereas perhaps that might not be the most suitable way here. There's quite a lot of different forms of participatory democracy and we feel it's better if we pick the ones that work for us. We don't mind doing it, but it might look different here to somewhere else.”

Participant 13

The relationship between the Scottish Government and Public Service Authorities and the corresponding powers and capacities of each were noted throughout the interviews, with a focus on the promotion of and responsibility for Participation Requests going forward.

“If the Scottish Government is keen to promote this way of working then they need to promote it widely. If they want public agencies to take ownership over renewing services, then I think that effort needs to happen naturally, as opposed to at our end.”

Participant 8

“So there's maybe a bit more promotion needed locally within the council here, but also nationally. Could there be some kind of advertising to make people more aware? I don't think there was a big splash publicly about them when the legislation came in.”

Participant 14

This recommendation foregrounds the need for the Scottish Government and Public Service Authorities to commit to collaboratively promoting Participation Requests. Approaches to promotion should advance a national aspiration to embed new forms of decision-making alongside nuanced approaches that respond to localised contexts and organisational priorities.



Research Recommendations

In aiming to understand how Participation Request legislation can be strengthened to empower communities, this research has gathered and analysed data from a range of primary and secondary sources in order to synthesise findings as policy recommendations. Quantitative analysis of Annual Reporting data and qualitative accounts of the experiential, contextual, relational, and political dimensions of Participation Requests foregrounded patterns and gaps surrounding local and national activity and key thematic areas of concern. Interwoven in the interview analysis and insights, Community Participation Body and Public Service Authority participants put forward a range of ideas and proposals to address challenges and constraints, and ways to extend examples of good practice at scale to strengthen Participation Requests' impact.

These research findings provide the foundations for the following set of seven recommendations to the Scottish Government to inform the current review of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015). These recommendations were drafted and circulated to all participants as a form of member-checking to provide opportunities for review and iteration and to enhance validity. Four participants provided further detail via email, which has been integrated into the recommendations where appropriate.

In addition to developing the results of previous Participation Request evaluations (Broadley and Dixon, 2022; McMillan et al., 2020; Paterson, 2018; Plotnikova and Bennett, 2018), the research recognises linkages to the **Social Studios' Participation Request Toolbox** (Glasgow School of Art, 2022) and SCDC's (2022) creation of **Participation Request Resource Pack**. Together these comprise a holistic collection of assets to translate and implement recommendations into practice. As such, in this section the recommendations are accompanied by examples of such assets developed and designed to support communities and organisations during the Participation Request Process. Whilst these examples are provided here in part to illustrate the issues that have been explored through prior research and practice, the recommendations' reference to the toolbox and resources reinforces a call for the consolidation and promotion of existing Participation Request support materials as a sustainable approach to refining, implementing, and embedding recommendations.

Recommendation 1.

Provide guidance around establishing early dialogue as a first step in the Participation Request process.

Responding to Public Service Authorities' reflections on the value of meeting with communities prior to the submission of a Participation Request, this recommendation seeks to promote understandings of issues to be resolved and to define outcomes clearly and collectively.

In strengthening direct links between communities and the dedicated point-of-contact and the associated services within the Public Service Authority, this will help to lay the foundations for partnership working, either within the formal bounds of the Participation Request, or to address the issues via an alternative route.

Potential guidance should include a series of steps and prompts to shape initial discussions and testimonials and tips from experienced Participation Request users, as well as signposting to existing Participation Request resources to support productive dialogue.

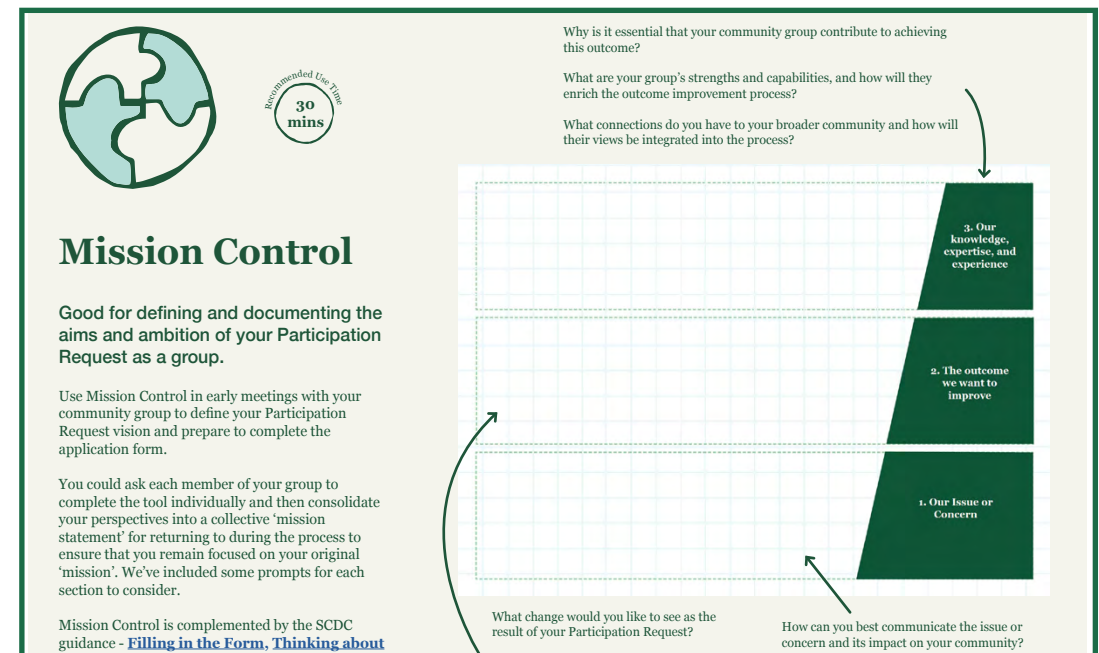


Figure 11. *Mission Control* (2022) Tool to support communities to frame their Participation Request (webpage – detail). Social Studios Co-designers.

Recommendation 2.
Revise the list of eligible Public Service Authorities to include further public sector structures and organisations.

Recognising challenges arising concerning eligible Public Service Authorities' limited powers to affect change and improvement in Participation Requests, this recommendation seeks to better align the needs of communities with the capacities and capability of Public Service Authorities across Scotland. Participants noted instances in which opportunities has arisen for additional public bodies to be involved in Participation Requests and for this to have led to improved outcomes. Specific bodies noted in the research to be included as eligible Public Service Authorities are Community Planning Partnerships, Housing Associations, Integration Joint Boards, and South of Scotland Enterprise.

In addition to enhancing transparency and accountability in the implementation and reporting of Participation Requests, considerations of gaps and opportunities within the current list of Public Service Authorities and the promotion of a revised list has the potential to raise public sector awareness of and engagement with the legislation.

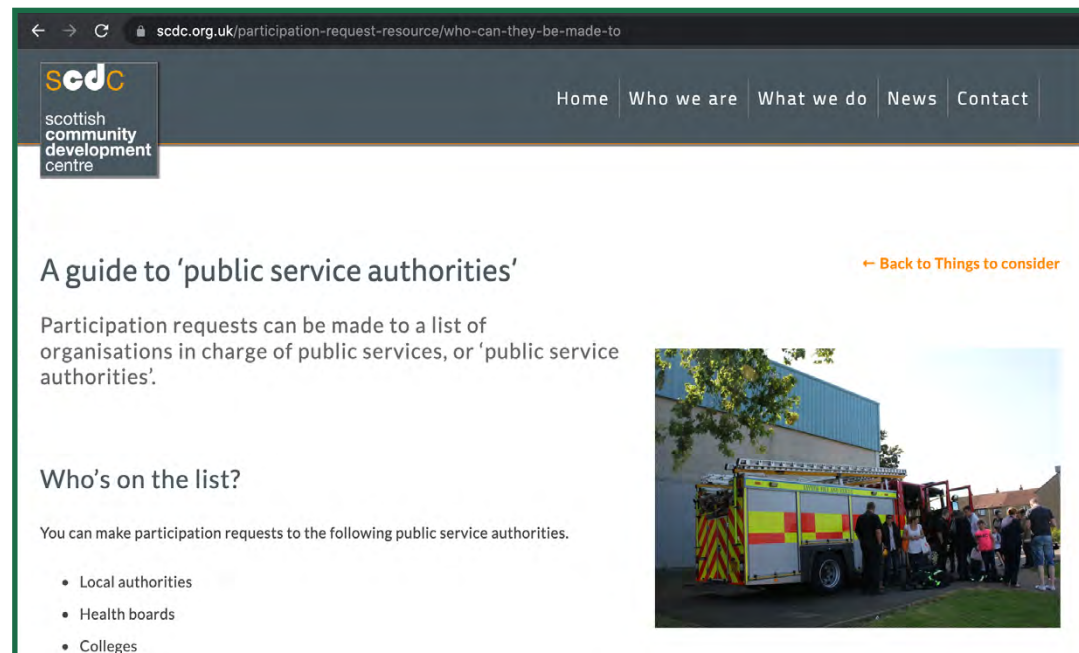


Figure 12. *A Guide to Public Service Authorities* (2021) Guidance setting out eligible and ineligible Public Service Authorities (webpage – detail). SCDC.

Recommendation 3.
Develop and deliver updated information sessions for Public Service Authorities to clarify and reiterate the purpose and scope of the legislation.

Participants' discussions of Public Service Authority staff turnaround, varying understandings of and approaches to Participation Requests, and challenges surrounding implementation and resources point towards the need for a refreshed series of information sessions for Public Service Authorities. Sessions should focus on reintroducing the underpinning legislation, establishing the core terms and values of Participation Requests, and sharing examples of good practice and meaningful impacts that have been achieved. They also present the opportunity to collate and update all existing guidance and resources and consolidate a defined training package for Public Service Authorities, including sector-specific guidance, scenarios for effective Participation Request use, and links to other relevant policy and engagement approaches. In addition to involving a broad cross-section of staff to increase buy-in, there is potential to include Third Sector Organisations as a means of garnering broader awareness, targeted promotion, and support for Community Participation Bodies.

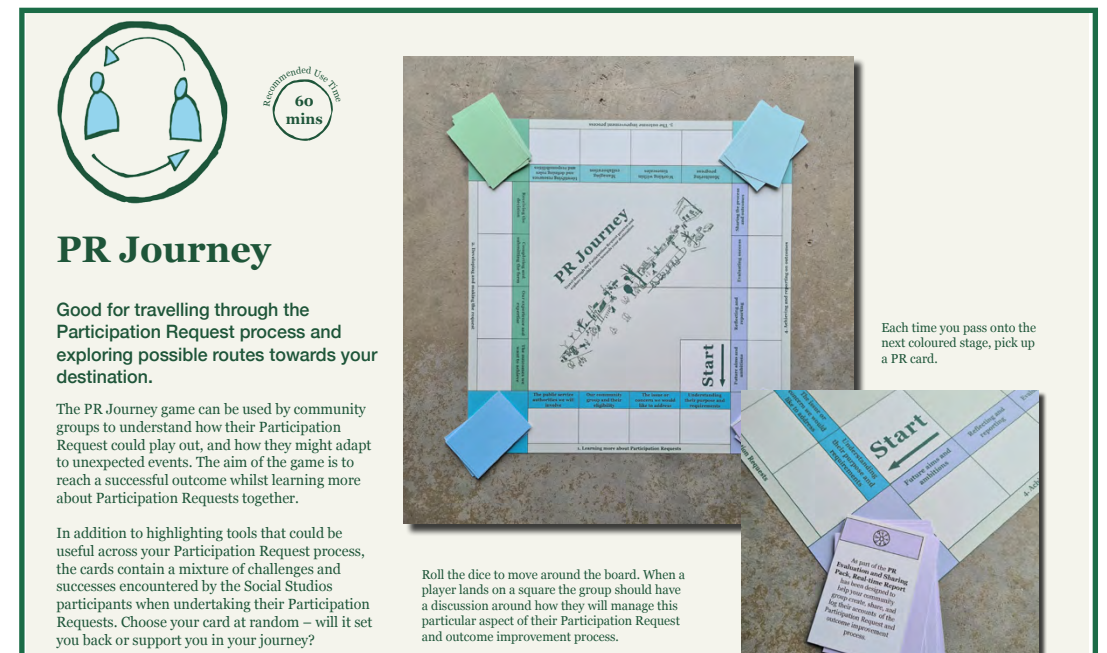


Figure 13. *Participation Request Journey* (2022) Tool to enhance dialogue around Participation Request legislation and implementation (webpage – detail). Social Studios Co-designers.

**Recommendation 4.
Support Community Participation Bodies and Public Service Authorities to co-design the Outcome Improvement Process.**

The legislation’s lack of focus and detail around the design and delivery of the Outcome Improvement Process was framed in the interviews as an key area to address. The provision and effective signposting of updated guidance and resources will contribute to significantly addressing challenges experienced by Public Service Authorities and Community Participation Bodies including agreeing a sequence of activities, milestones, and timelines; raising awareness of assets and expertise and defining the added value of partnership working; and instigating positive dialogue to support equitable collaboration towards achieving meaningful outcomes.

Introducing a defined and required but flexible format for the Outcome Improvement Process will help to bring a level of parity across Participation Requests locally and nationally. This will also go some way to strengthening Community Participation Bodies’ role in shaping meaningful outcomes, and contribute to providing a framework for evaluation.

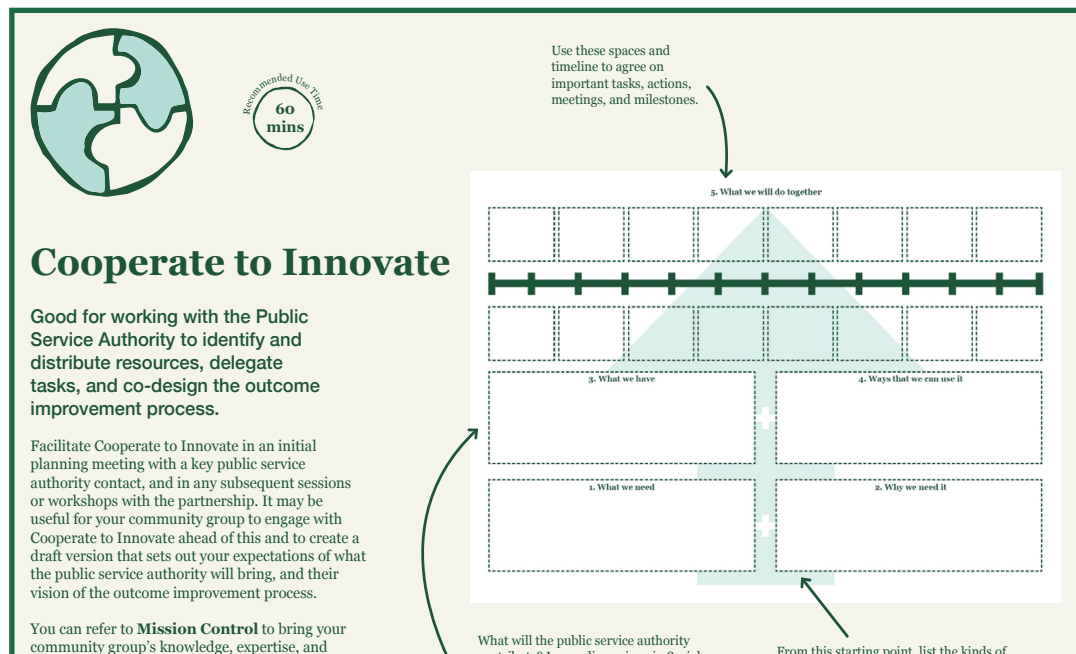


Figure 14. *Cooperate to Innovate* (2022) Tool to support Community Participation Bodies and Public Service Authorities to design the Outcome Improvement Process together (webpage – detail). Social Studios Co-designers.

**Recommendation 5.
Introduce a formal requirement and mechanisms for Public Service Authorities to report Participation Request activity directly to the Scottish Government.**

Despite the legislation stating that Public Service Authorities must publish annual Participation Request reports, this research has underlined how low reporting figures and fragmented data nationally contribute to an incomplete picture of Participation Request activity. Clarity is required within the legislation concerning the content to be provided, the form that the report should take, how Annual Reporting data will be shared and used, and crucially, the role this will play in providing accountable public services. In addition to developing and implementing a robust and accessible mechanism to capture meaningful data (and revising the existing template shown in Figure 15), updated communication and guidance will underline the role of reporting in evidencing the use and impact of Participation Requests to inform future policy decisions. There is scope for these Annual Reporting requirements to be integrated with recommendations advocating for updated information sessions and new approaches to evaluation.

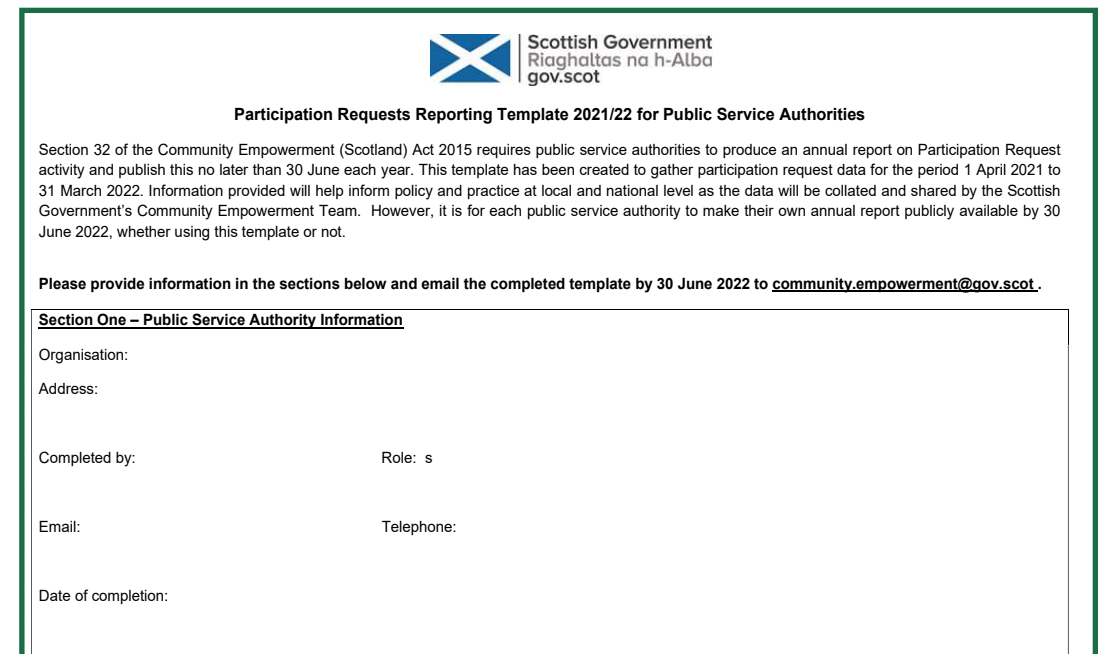


Figure 15. *Participation Request Reporting Template* (2021) Current format for Public Service Authority Annual Reporting (digital document – detail). the Scottish Government.

Recommendation 6.
Produce guidance and resources for monitoring, evaluating, and disseminating Participation Request outcomes and impact.

Responding to gaps identified within Annual Reporting data and acknowledging a need to define meaningful metrics for understanding Participation Request activity, this recommendation highlights the necessity to embed evaluation within Participation Requests locally and nationally. Such a strategy must recognise the value of capturing and analysing the lived experience of undertaking a Participation Request, and the difference this can make to the lives of people and communities.

A range of approaches, methods, and tools including interim evaluation check-points, Community Participation Body reporting templates, and ongoing monitoring of outcomes should be integrated to track Participation Request progress in action, how and when outcomes are achieved, unintended consequences, and lasting benefits. Participation Request case studies are a fundamental component of this recommendation. Building on SCDC’s work in this area (2022), the research puts forward a further exemplar Participation Request undertaken by People First (Scotland) in Appendix 5.

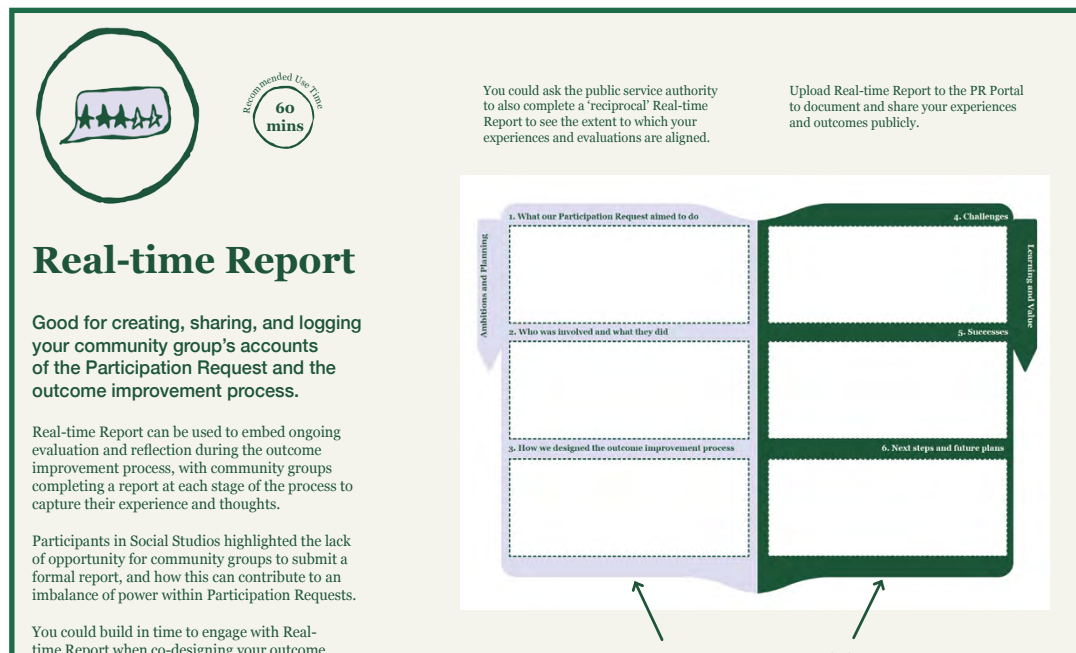


Figure 16. *Real-time Report* (2022) Tool to support equitable reporting of Participation Request experiences and outcomes (webpage – detail). Social Studios Co-designers.

Recommendation 7.
Co-develop with Public Service Authorities local and national strategies to enhance public promotion, awareness, and understanding of Participation Requests.

This final recommendation foregrounds the Scottish Government’s power and agency in leading a national strategy to both raise broad public awareness of Participation Requests and strengthen accessibility, inclusion, and diversity.

A key element of promotion includes mapping and communicating to diverse public audiences where Participation Requests are located and how they intersect within related policy and established community engagement approaches. Case studies of good practice, benefits and impacts, and lessons learned play a significant role in making Participation Requests transparent, tangible, and accessible. A national promotion strategy should also define how best practice in community engagement and digital methods can strengthen Participation Requests as a means of addressing inequalities. Promotion is therefore fundamental in positioning Participation Requests as an inclusive tool for people and communities to participate in local decision-making.

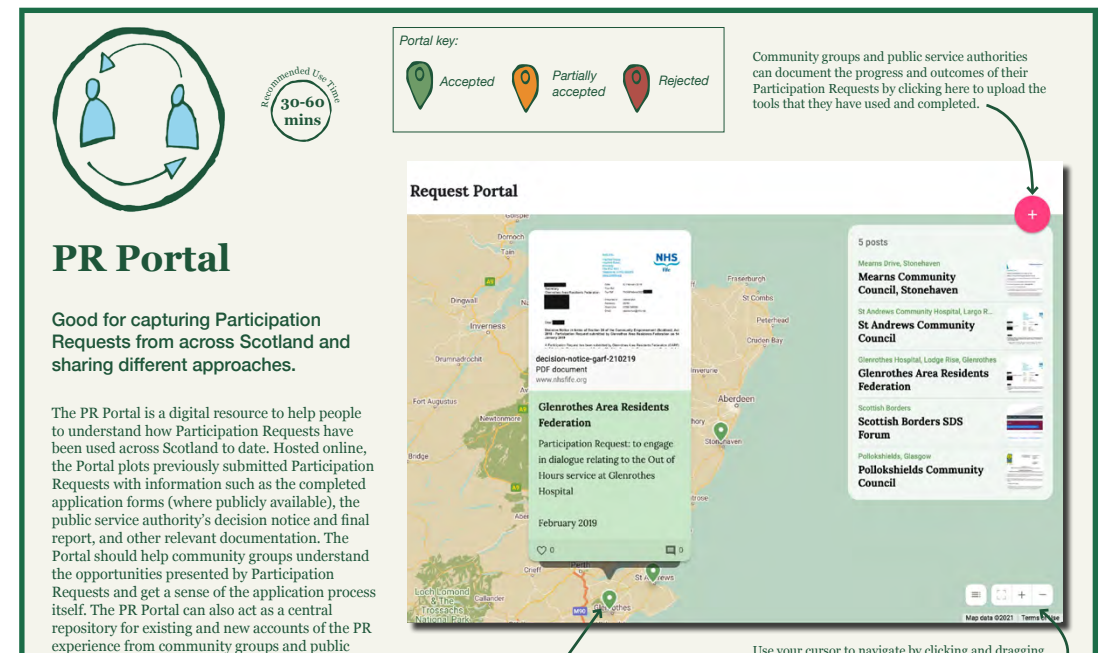


Figure 17. *Participation Request Portal* (2022) Tool to enhance dissemination and awareness of Participation Requests at a national level (webpage – detail). Social Studios Co-designers.

Conclusions

This report has presented findings from the Understanding Participation Requests: Informing User Experience, Guidance, and Legislation research project, conducted by the School of Innovation and Technology at the Glasgow School of Art from August 2023 to January 2024, and commissioned and funded by the Scottish Government. Upon setting out the context of Participation Requests and outlining the methodological approach, the report identified key thematic insights and findings. These findings have been positioned to inform a series of seven recommendations concerning the future of Participation Requests and proposals to strengthen their capacity to inform and influence policy at local levels.

Responding to the Research Question and Objectives

In investigating how Participation Request legislation can be strengthened to empower communities and with the aim to contribute to the current review of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015), the research has defined opportunities to enhance the experiences of communities and organisations engaging with Participation Requests; the content, format, and delivery of supporting guidance; and the efficacy of the underpinning legislation.

Quantitative analysis and accompanying visualisation of the Annual Reporting data highlighted patterns, gaps, connections, and distinctions concerning Participation Requests submitted and granted to date, Public Service Authority types, local authorities and their associated geographies, Participation Request activity over time, Community Participation Body types, and reporting practices and rates. Qualitative data collection and thematic analysis surfaced Participation Request users' experiences and attitudes, understandings of nuanced regional variations, examples of the local issues that Participation Requests have addressed and the diversity of outcomes that have been achieved.

Whilst barriers and challenges surrounding Participation Requests were raised, there was a recognition from even the most critical participants of Participation Requests' intent to promote democratic renewal at a local level. Alongside this, examples of effective Participation Request practice were noted throughout the interviews and instances were illuminated where

Participation Requests have led to other forms of participation, including longer-term involvement in decision-making structures and parallel policy interventions.

The interviews explicated linkages between Participation Request use and impact both locally and nationally, considering the need for flexible and adaptable metrics and measures to understand and capture impact for different users.

As the recommendations underline, consolidated guidance and support – including clear information on Participation Request terms and processes, targeted training on handling Participation Requests, resources to support engagement and collaboration, and national and local promotion – are key to enhancing awareness, interpretation, transparency, accountability, and crucially, the practice of participation.

These discussions reinforce an overarching research finding that the effectiveness and sustainability of the legislation must simultaneously encompass the robust capture and analysis of quantitative data, the attainment of intended outcomes, and approaches that recognise and infold Participation Requests' experiential, contextual, relational, and political dimensions.

Limitations and Reflections

Challenges around the capture and consistency of Annual Reporting data impacted upon the initial timeline of the research. This led to an unanticipated phase of additional data collection through secondary desk research as a means of obtaining an accurate data set to inform analysis. Whilst this did extend phase 1 and push back subsequent activities as a result, it led to significant insights concerning perceptions of Participation Requests, reporting practices and rates, accountability within Public Service Authorities, and fundamentally, the need to define the value and impact of Participation Requests through both statistical measures and accounts of lived experience.

Regarding the qualitative approach to capturing and analysing Participation Request experiences, it is acknowledged that the participant sample in phase 2 of the research was considerably small, and as such, the interview findings are not deemed representative of all the issues facing Participation Request users at a national scale.

As stated previously however, with the purpose of this phase being to explore how patterns and gaps revealed through quantitative analysis are manifest in practice, the interviews were significant in linking such findings to users' experiences, aspirations, and ideas for improvement, and in turn, in developing the recommendations.

The research initially sought to integrate an equal balance of Public Service Authorities' and Community Participation Bodies' perspectives as users of the legislation. Response rates however were low, and only six participants representing three Community Participation Bodies chose to take part in the interviews. This impacted on the range of Participation Request experiences and views to draw from, and the extent to which communities' awareness of Participation Requests and their capacity to engage in formal collaborative decision-making were examined.

At the same time, the relationship between inequalities and Participation Requests were discussed throughout the interviews and highlighted as a critical area of concern through both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Building on Social Studios' engagement with twelve individual Community Participation Body representatives, the interactive tools co-designed through this prior research to amplify the power and potential of Community Participation Bodies are illustrated in this report to support the research recommendations. In turn, they further exemplify the need to consolidate and harness existing resources to offer additional points of access and participation in Participation Requests, and thus enhance diverse and equitable community engagement.

With dedicated resource to gather and analyse further data at national and local levels, there is potential to undertake future research using SIMD 2020 and additional participatory methods, tools, and technologies to actively identify less formally-organised groups and work with them throughout the Participation Request process. In order for Participation Requests to serve as a potent policy tool for fostering substantial democratic renewal and reforming public services, they must be accessible and applicable to all people and communities from across Scotland.



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Appendices

Appendix 1: Semi-structured Interview Topic Guide

Topic	Public Service Authorities	Community Participation Bodies
Can you tell me more about your role and the ways that you've worked with Participation Requests?		
Alignment of Participation Requests to your aims, culture, and practices; how they are understood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does your organisation approach Participation Requests? - Do you have any specific procedures in place? - Did staff receive training? How aware and knowledgeable are they? - In what situations do you think a Participation Request is the right / a suitable option for a community? - What are the alternatives, when/ why are these be preferable? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tell me a bit about your community group (how it was formed, its size, representation, skills, members/ staff, resources...) - How did you become aware of Participation Requests? - Why did you decide to submit a Participation Request? - Did you consider any alternative approaches?
Information and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How effective do you think the guidance surrounding Participation Requests is? - What do you think are the main barriers surrounding Participation Requests? - What skills and capabilities are needed to engage with Participation Requests? What is needed from communities? - Where do you go / who do you ask if you need support with handling Participation Requests? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How effective do you think the guidance is? - What do you think are the main barriers? - What skills and capabilities are needed from a community to engage? What is needed from Public Service Authorities? - What support did you need and were you able to access it? Who provided this – certain people already on the group, Public Service Authority, other organisations?
The Outcome Improvement Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is your experience of the Outcome Improvement Process? 	
Outcomes and Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (How) did the Covid 19 pandemic and lockdowns impact upon Participation Requests? - How does your organisation monitor and report on them and outcomes? - What benefits and impacts have there been in your area? - What would you say your Public Service Authority has learned from its experiences of Participation Requests to date, and have you changed any ways of working with them or with communities because of this? - From your experience, what does a successful Participation Request look like? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (How) did Covid 19 impact upon your capacity to engage in local decision making? - How was your Participation Request monitored /how did you ensure that it led to the outcomes that you wanted? - What benefits have there been from the outcome? - Were there any other benefits or impacts for your community? - What would you say your community has learned from your experience of Participation Requests, and what would you do differently? - From your experience, what does a successful Participation Request look like?
Opportunities for improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the biggest challenges for Participation Requests or the most difficult aspects? - What opportunities can you see to make Participation Requests more effective? 	

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

SCHOOL OF INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ARTS

Understanding Participation Request Data to Inform User Experience, Guidance, and Legislation

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research project that is being carried out by the School of Innovation and Technology (SIT) at The Glasgow School of Art (GSA) on behalf of The Scottish Government. Before you decide whether to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being undertaken and what it will involve. Please read the following information and discuss this with others if you wish. If anything is unclear or if you require further information, please ask.

What is the purpose of the research project?
 Understanding Participation Request Data investigates the legislation underpinning Participation Requests and identifies ways that it could be strengthened to further empower communities. You are invited to participate in an interview reflecting on your experiences of Participation Requests, aiming to identify challenges and opportunities at both local and national levels. The outcomes of the research will contribute to the existing review of The Community Empowerment Act (Scotland) 2015.

Why have I been invited?
 You have been invited because you have experience of submitting a Participation Request or you work in a Public Service Authority with a responsibility to promote, review, and support Participation Requests.

What will the research involve?
 Your participation would involve taking part in a one-hour interview. The interview will follow a semi-structured topic guide and provide opportunities for reflection and discussion of your experience of working with Participation Requests and your perspective on their contribution and value to community engagement and empowerment policy and practice. Reflecting on how Participation Requests are promoted, accessed, interpreted, developed, submitted, and resolved, you will be encouraged to consider current barriers, constraints, and needs, and the capabilities, competencies, and resources that could be used to address these. We are also interested in understanding your thoughts around current guidance, local and regional challenges, and examples of good practice across Scotland.

What will happen if I decide to take part?
 If you think that you would like to take part in the research, please complete the attached Participant Consent Form and return this to the GSA researcher by 26.09.23.

Each element of consent will be carefully and simply explained. The interview will take place remotely over a Zoom video meeting, hosted by the researcher using

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Final Version

GSA's licenced and secure institutional account. You are free to obscure your living or working space with a virtual background or turn your webcam off whenever you wish.

The research data will be gathered by audio recording the Zoom interview directly onto the researcher's GSA laptop. Please indicate via the Participant Consent Form or speak with the researcher if you are uncomfortable being recorded in this way.

Following the interview the audio recording will be transcribed by the researcher. During transcription details that might identify participants will be removed. After transcription the audio recording will be securely destroyed and not used directly in the research. Further detail is provided below outlining how the interview transcripts will be used in the research.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

Your personal data collected through the research will be stored securely, as approved by GSA's Data Protection Officer, with access restricted to the named GSA Researcher. Your personal and research data (the interview transcripts) will be used solely for the purpose of the project and no other reason and will remain confidential. Everything that you choose to share in this research will only be disseminated through the use of pseudonyms (a name that is different to yours) and your responses will be presented as themes and concepts, with relevant direct quotations being highlighted and discussed where appropriate.

The personal and research data collected through the research will be stored securely on the researcher's GSA password-protected laptop computer. Only the researcher will have access to this laptop. Hard copies will be stored in a secure cabinet in the SIT office. This cabinet is only accessed by SIT staff, and an administrator is the keyholder.

The researcher will carry out a phase of thematic analysis to examine patterns and foreground insights from the interview transcripts. Taking the form of a written report with tables, charts, and figures to communicate key findings, this aggregated analysis of the research will be presented to The Scottish Government to support the development of a wider report on the effectiveness of Part 3 of the Community Empowerment Act (Scotland) 2015. The outcomes of the research may also be included in further conference presentation and / or academic journal publication.

Following GDPR legislation, your personal and research data will be used solely for the purpose of the project and no other reason and will remain confidential. Everything that you choose to share in this research will be made anonymous and will only be disseminated through the use of pseudonyms. Personal data will be retained for one year, and research data will be retained for ten years then securely destroyed in line with GSA's research data management policy.

Who is conducting and funding the research?

The research is being conducted by Dr Cara Broadley, Research Fellow at SIT at GSA. The research has been commissioned and funded by the Scottish Government to contribute to the existing review of The Community Empowerment Act (Scotland) 2015.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part is entirely voluntary. The researcher will describe the study and go through the information sheet before asking you to sign the Participant Consent Form to show you agreed to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. In this case, your permission will be sought to include your contributions anonymously in the reporting of the research. If you do not give your permission your contributions will be destroyed securely and withdrawn from the research.

Who should I contact for further information?

Dr Cara Broadley
Research Fellow
School of Innovation and Technology
Haldane Building
24 Hill Street
The Glasgow School of Art
Glasgow G3 6RQ

C.Broadley@gsa.ac.uk | 07538308391

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For further information or to make a complaint contact Research Office, The Glasgow School of Art, research@gsa.ac.uk.

Appendix 3: Participant Consent Form

Understanding Participation Request Data to Inform User Experience, Guidance, and Legislation

Participant Information Sheet

Researcher: Dr Cara Broadley | Research Fellow | School of Innovation and
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Please circle or highlight yes or no:

1. I have read and understood the Information Sheet about the above
research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions about it.
Yes No
2. I agree to being a participant for the purposes of the above research
project.
Yes No
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to
withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. Any information I have
given will be used with my permission or may be withdrawn from the
research.
Yes No
4. I agree to participate in a remote interview via a Zoom video meeting.
Yes No
5. I understand that audio recordings of myself will be captured for the
purposes of this research.
Yes No
6. I understand that the data I provide in the interview will remain anonymous
and will be reported through the use of pseudonyms.
Yes No
7. I agree to my anonymous contributions being directly quoted where
appropriate, and aggregated into an analysis of the research and to be
used in a report to inform the existing review of The Community
Empowerment Act (Scotland) 2015.
Yes No

8. I agree to my anonymous contributions being directly quoted where
appropriate, and aggregated for purposes such as funding proposals,
journal articles, conference paper / presentations, lectures or broadcasts.
Yes No
9. Do you wish to add any other instructions or restrictions in relation to your
contribution?
Yes No

If **yes** please give details

.....
.....
.....

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Name (please print):.....

.....



Researcher Signed:
Researcher Name: Dr Cara Broadley

Date:.....

Appendix 4: Analogue Spreadsheet (detail)

Region	2020-2021							2021-2022							2022-2023							Notes
	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	
Argyll & Bute	N	N																				
Dumfries & Galloway	Y	Y	Y	Y																		
Fife	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Highland	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Perth & Kinross	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
South Ayrshire	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	

Appendix 5: People First (Scotland) Participation Request Case Study

People First (Scotland) Case Study

People First (Scotland) works for the human rights of people who have the labels of Learning Disability or Intellectual Impairment. It is a Collective Advocacy Organisation run for and by people with a Learning Disability. In Early January 2022 People First (Scotland) submitted a Participation Request to Fife Council to open discussion around the reduction and closure of local Community Based Services and the impact of limited support.

Background

People First (Scotland) began in 1989 when members at their first National conference decided that they should have their own organisation. People First (Scotland) is a disabled people's organisation (DPO) and is controlled by its members who all have a Learning Disability. That means that no-one else has any say at all in what their organisation does and that people with a learning disability can regain control and be the decision makers in their lives and their organisation.

In Early 2022 People First (Scotland) submitted a Participation Request to Fife Health and Social Care Partnership to open discussion around the reduction and closure of local Community Based Services and the impact of limited support.

Services had seen closures as a result of the Covid pandemic but little was being done to discuss their remobilisation or communicate what was happening with the services. People who used the services had not been consulted on these changes to service provision and People First (Scotland) were able to provide support to enable them to speak out about the impact this was having on their lives.

Through the Participation Request lodged by People First (Scotland), they wanted to understand why these decisions had been made and to work together with the Health and Social Care Partnership to firstly, produce an easy read guide to communicate this to service users of and secondly to help redesign and redevelop an open and inclusive service for people with learning disabilities that meets their needs as well as supports them to live a positive and good life.

Making the Request

Prior to submitting the Participation request, People First (Scotland) had tried other mechanisms to instigate change and let the Partnership know that people were feeling abandoned and forgotten by the service. Members met with the Learning Disability Steering Group and also wrote letters to the head of Social Work services to try to resolve the issue first. When this was unsuccessful Members met with Health Improvement Scotland, who highlighted Participation Request as an mechanism to request more involvement in public service decision-making.

At that time, People First (Scotland) were undertaking National work on the importance of Community Based Services for people across Scotland and the importance of having a good support service. These topics and issues are ongoing concerns for the organisation as a whole and part of their key messaging agenda. People First (Scotland) also carried out extensive engagement with their members to understand the impact of the reduction and closure and services on their individual wellbeing to inform the process. This parallel work helped strengthen the need for further engagement and better communication in Fife, and by the Health and Social Care Partnership.

The Outcome Improvement Process

The Outcome Improvement Process provided a dedicated space for People First (Scotland) to speak with the Fife Health and Social Care Partnership and work with them to prevent further reduction or closure of services and to support further consultation of services users to consider how they want their services to look. People First was asked to help work in partnership to facilitate consultations in each community based service building (often referred to as Day Centre) and to help plan better models of provision. A working group has been set up as well as a Board which consist of all invested groups including those advocating for people with a Learning Disability (like People First, Carers, Parents, those in education, in Social Work and other invested parties).

As a result of the Participation Request discussion has been made around the creation of an Equalities Impact Assessment and continues to lead to further discussion with Fife Health & Social Care Partnership on ways that they can work together in the future to shape services for people with a Learning Disability. A person with a learning disability who is also a Director of People First, and therefore represents the collective voice for those who use services, now sits on the Board of decision makers about what happens in the future alongside the Partnership. They also work alongside professionals in the working group to help plan and shape the services for the years to come, helping with planning decisions about transport, building access, activities people undertake as well as lots of other important decisions, helping to shape their own service and making real meaning of 'Participation' by working on this together.

The Outcome

The Participation Request led to better communication and accessible information from the Health and Social Care Partnership and local service providers.

It also resulted in People First (Scotland)'s members having their voices heard and ensuring the safeguarding of their rights to an assessment of need, as set out in the Community Care Act. In many cases this has also led to the reassessment of individuals and their services being reinstated or increased.

Importantly, the Participation Request highlighted for inclusive consultation to be embedded into local service review and redesign as standard, and for integrating lived experience into decision-making processes.

Learning

People First (Scotland) feel that the formal nature of the Participation Request helped them to have their voices heard and taken seriously, leading to meaningful outcomes for their organisation and wider community. The Participation Request also led to other unanticipated outcomes that have made a real difference to how the organisation operates and the inclusion of members in broader forms of decision-making.

“The people and our members with the real experiences can see that something is being done. Now people are working really well together and trying to make it better.”

Susan Burt, Director (Fife), People First (Scotland)

“It's led to lots of participation. We've been promised a bigger budget for community-based services over the next three years, they've introduced a new participation and engagement team, and we now sit on the Board.”

Katie Cook, Supervisory Development Worker (Fife), People First (Scotland)

