

West Lothian Council Participation Request Annual Report 2018/19

Introduction

West Lothian Council adopted its participation request process on 1 April 2017. As required under Section 32 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, this annual report has been prepared to set out the number of participation requests received; number of requests agreed and refused; number of requests which resulted in changes to a public service provided by, or on behalf of, the public service authority; and action taken by West Lothian Council to promote and support the use of participation requests.

West Lothian Council Participation Request Process

The council's Community Planning and Regeneration Team are the first point of contact for all requests coming in to the council. For each request received, a 'Participation Request Panel' will be identified, chaired by the council's Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration and made up of the relevant head(s) of service, officers and partners as required. Panel members will vary depending on the nature of the request. The Panel will be responsible for validating and making a decision on the request, unless it is agreed that decision making needs to take place at committee (for example, for more complex or larger scale requests).

Further detail on the council's application and decision making process is available at:

<https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/article/21540/Participation-Requests>

The process was reviewed following the first request received to ensure the application and decision making processes were fit for purpose. This was informed by feedback from the Participation Request Panel and the community group that made the request, as well as consideration of the national learning report on participation requests developed by the Scottish Community Development Centre. No significant changes were proposed; however minor changes to improve the process and to further increase awareness within the community and council services were approved.

Participation Requests Received in 2018/19

Three participation requests were received by the council in 2018/19. Two were approved and one was refused.

The following section summarises these requests. Full detail on these can be found on the Participation Request page of the council's website.

Submitted by	Participation Request	Acknowledged Receipt	Decision	Outcome Improvement Process (OIP)
Bathgate Community Council	Increased awareness within the Bathgate community of the council's roads policies and where the community can influence and improve existing policies through local involvement	4 May 2018	Approved (15 June 2018)	The OIP agreed with the CC involved an invitation to visit the Roads depot to meet staff and find out more about what goes on, followed by a meeting with officers to consider specific points in relation to improved understanding and involvement in Roads processes. Actions are currently being taken forward by the council. A follow-up meeting to review progress and effectiveness of changes will then be held to conclude the process.
Linlithgow and Linlithgow Bridge Community Council	Request for a community council representative to become a member of the Local Area Committee	5 November 2018 Met with the community council 28 November 2018	Refused (30 November 2018)	N/A. Note: This request was refused following discussion with the CC. It was agreed that this did not meet the statutory requirements for a participation request, as the outcome specified was not something that is the result of the provision, delivery or offer of a service by the council.
Linlithgow and Linlithgow Bridge Community Council	Request for representation on the Vennel project team and to contribute to the project briefing process to ensure the views of the community are taken into account	19 November 2018	Approved (25 January 2019 – extension agreed with community council)	Although some of the terminology in the request was not correct (there is not currently a Vennel Project Team), it was agreed that this was a valid request. It should be noted that the request was assessed in relation to the process leading up to a decision being taken by committee on The Vennel redevelopment. The agreed OIP includes discussions between the CC and council officers to consider the CC's response to the council's consultation on draft proposals, before officers report again to PDSP and committee. Once committee has decided how to proceed, officers will discuss with the CC if and how ongoing involvement can be achieved.

Number of requests which resulted in changes to a public service provided by, or on behalf of, the public service authority

The two approved requests are still ongoing and so it is not yet possible to record any changes made.

Action taken to promote and support the use of participation requests

West Lothian Council promoted and supported the use of participation requests through various channels throughout 2018/19.

Promotion

- The council continues to maintain a dedicated participation request page on its website, providing information on the process and the relevant forms and guidance for making a request. The link has been shared widely.
- Community groups have been asked to share information on the process to their local networks.
- A series of sessions have also been held to take information out to community groups:
 - A Community Empowerment awareness-raising session was held in November 2018 to provide information on different parts of the Act, including participation requests, to local community groups. This included feedback from a local community council that had made a successful request. It is intended that further sessions will be rolled out in 2019.
 - The Joint Forum for West Lothian Community Councils received a second presentation on participation requests in December 2018. The relevant information and application form has also been shared with community councils via the Knowledge Hub.
 - Efforts have been made to promote the process to 'hard to reach' groups. The participation request process has been discussed with the West Lothian Race Forum and West Lothian Faith Group, as well as to one of the regeneration steering groups (the regeneration plans are the CPP's locality plans and cover the most deprived areas).
- Information on the council's process has also been shared with local community planning partners, both through email communication and through CPP Board reports.

Support

- A designated point of contact has been identified so that community groups know where to make a request to or find out further information.
- A Participation Request 'Toolkit' has been developed to provide information on participation requests and to guide community groups through the council's process. This is available on the participation request page of the council's website and has been shared widely.
- The website also includes links to the Scottish Government and Scottish Community Development Centre's Guidance.
- The application form includes detailed guidance notes.

- All materials and information on the website include an offer of support to community groups for making a request and community groups are encouraged to engage with the council's Community Planning and Regeneration Team as early as possible around potential requests. This support includes signposting community groups to any existing mechanisms for involvement and engagement.
- A staff briefing is being prepared to ensure council staff are aware of the process.
- Community Empowerment Act Frequently Asked Questions, specific to West Lothian, have also been developed and are available on the council's website: <https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/article/16160/Community-Empowerment>
- With regards to the requests received to date, where these have not been considered to be valid, an offer was extended to the community group to meet to discuss the request. This offer was taken up by the two community councils that submitted requests in 2018/19, with one going on to submit a valid request.
- The council will continue review how to better tailor support for more marginalised groups.

Conclusion

West Lothian Council adopted its participation request process on 1 April 2017. An application form is available online and the council has taken steps to promote this process and to provide support to community groups looking to make a request.

Three participation requests were received in 2018/19. Two of these were agreed and one was refused.

The council encourages community groups to discuss any potential requests with officers as early as possible. This provides an opportunity to discuss any support needs of the group, ensure the request is being made to the correct public body and to discuss whether any similar requests have been received. It may also be that the council and group can work together out-with the formal request process or there may be existing mechanisms for involvement. The council continues to provide opportunities for communities to get involved, such as tenant participation groups, regeneration steering groups, equality forums, Citizens Panel. The number of participation requests received therefore does not reflect all activity to involve community bodies in improving local outcomes.