

# Engagement, Participation and Empowerment Strategy



Community Planning  
Aberdeen

# Foreword

This strategy is of relevance to everyone in Aberdeen. It is about the way in which individuals and families, the communities they belong to, community groups, community councils, charitable and voluntary organisations, and people working in the private sector and the public sector, collectively create and contribute to life in the city.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 provides an impetus to create a step-change in how organisations and communities experience engagement, participation and empowerment. Until now the standard approach has been to provide information and consult on plans that have already been developed. Our ambition is to move significantly beyond this.

While the Act sets out legal rights and responsibilities around participation, we seek to go beyond these legal requirements. The strategy sets out a vision of collaboration and empowerment as the new standard approach. Examples of existing practice are used to bring the different levels of engagement and empowerment to life, helping everyone to imagine what the vision would look like in real life.

This will be of vital interest to every person and every community in Aberdeen, as it offers a new way to work with organisations towards the common good.

This will be of vital interest to every statutory community planning partner in Aberdeen, as it will underpin all their activities with people and communities. Equally it will underpin the methods used to develop and deliver the Community Planning Aberdeen local outcome improvement plan and locality plans.



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# Executive Summary

New legislation provides communities with the right to make participation requests of public organisations and places a duty on the latter to meet these. A consistent approach by community planning partners will help staff and public develop a shared understanding of participation as the legislation comes into force. This strategy has been developed by a multi-partner working group who have sought wider participation throughout its development.

The strategy is intended to inform (a) the development of consistent participation policies by each community planning partner and (b) subsequent actions to help communities understand their rights under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

The metaphor of a ladder is used to represent the interactions between public organisations and people. The bottom rung represents the one-way provision of information, usually from public organisations to the public. The top rung represents self-determination, all the activities and decisions that are made independently by people in their communities. The rungs in between represent increasing two-way communication and decision-making between public organisations and communities.

Participation requests can be located on the ladder between “collaboration” and “empowerment”. While the rungs below remain very important – keeping people informed, consulting on decision-making, and hearing people’s concerns – the direction of travel will require public organisations to go beyond these. Fortunately

there is already experience of doing so that can be drawn upon, and examples from practice are used to illustrate how collaborative participation and empowerment can become a routine way of working.

Evolution to this future will be a journey rather than an event. The strategy does not set out a detailed implementation plan, as this cannot be imposed, but must be developed with the participation of those expected to deliver it.

The implementation plan will need to detail actions, evaluation methods and content for communication.

Community planning Aberdeen will have a vital role to play in facilitating and coordinating this work.

Empowerment	<b>Self-determination</b> People implement what they decide
	<b>Empowerment</b> Organisations implement what people decide
Engagement methods (increasing participation)	<b>Collaboration (coproduction)</b> Organisations seek people’s involvement in identifying issues, outlining options and making decisions
	<b>Involvement</b> People’s concerns inform organisations’ proposed decisions
	<b>Consultation</b> People’s views are listened to in respect of organisations’ proposed decisions
	<b>Informing</b> Organisations keep people informed of proposed decisions

# Introduction

Community engagement is increasingly at the forefront of public policy (see appendix one). Engagement methods range from the provision of information to supporting people’s participation in decision-making processes. Engagement is a means of developing better services, better use of resources and encouraging more productive and positive relationships between communities and public bodies. ‘Communities’ are defined as groups of people that may or may not live in the same area, and who share common interests, concerns or identities.

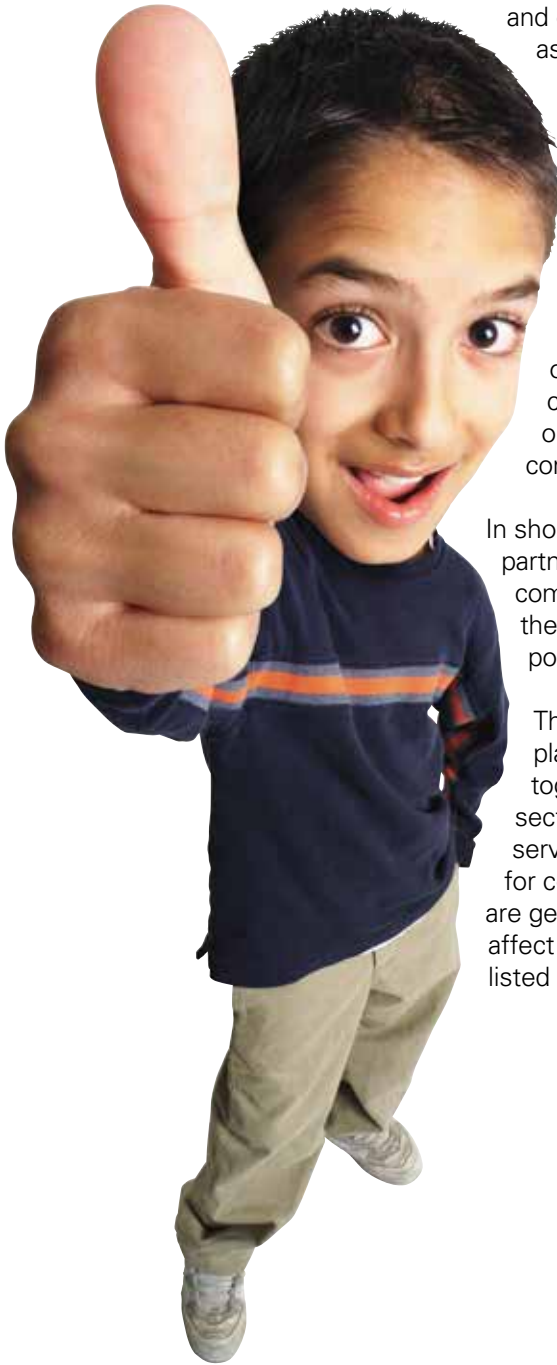
Community engagement is a way to build and support community empowerment. This is the name given to the process through which people have more of a say and have more control over the decisions that shape their lives and factors that contribute to their quality of life.

Empowerment recognises that communities are independently able and often wish to organise themselves and use their inherent assets and resources to improve the lives of those who live within them. While empowerment cannot be ‘given to’ people, it is something that communities and individuals can be supported to achieve. Empowerment requires people to take more power for themselves over their local resources and decision-making.

Community empowerment is therefore more than the involvement, participation or engagement of communities with public sector organisations. It also describes community ownership and action with a view toward social and political change. It is a process of re-negotiating the balance of power in order for communities to have a greater say and to have more control over the decisions that affect them.

In short, community engagement is the pursuit of collaborative partnership working between public sector organisations and the communities they serve, while community empowerment reflects the fact that communities’ own autonomy and freedom can be a powerful asset in creating a strong and resilient society.

This strategy reflects these positions in light of community planning arrangements in Aberdeen. Community planning brings together partners and agencies such as public organisations, third sector and communities to work together to plan and deliver better services to make a real difference to people’s lives. A key principle for community planning is to ensure that people and communities are genuinely involved in the decisions made by public services which affect them. (Current community planning partners in Aberdeen are listed in appendix two.)





## Strategic objectives

The local outcome improvement plan 2016 – 2026 and underpinning locality plans articulate the vision of Aberdeen City as a place where all people can prosper. This strategy will help ensure that all communities have an opportunity to shape what this means for them, and how they can get involved in making this happen

### Our objectives:

- communities’ inherent strengths and assets – their people, their energy, their connections, sense of purpose and resources, and their abilities to self-organise and exercise autonomy – will be valued as a fundamental building block of a healthy society
- every community will be equally heard and listened to
- participation will be the norm rather than the exception
- staff will be empowered to work in collaborative and empowering ways
- people will be able to see the difference that involvement has made

## Where we are just now

Before considering the future we need to take stock of where we are just now. This section sets out a way to think about the issues at hand using the metaphor of a ladder. Informing is the lowest rung of the ladder with each rung above that representing greater involvement and participation, through to self-determination at the top. The ladder is represented in the picture. Examples of current practice allow the ladder to be brought to life, and can serve as a solid foundation to build upon, alongside the newly developed national standards for community engagement (available at [www.voicescotland.org.uk](http://www.voicescotland.org.uk)).



## The ladder of engagement, participation and empowerment

	RUNG (goal)	TECHNIQUES
Empowerment	<b>Self-determination</b> People implement what they decide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Public sector stays out of the way or makes available support when requested</li></ul>
	<b>Empowerment</b> Organisations implement what people decide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Community capacity building</li><li>• Community Development Trusts</li></ul>
Engagement methods	<b>Collaboration (coproduction)</b> Organisations seek people’s involvement in identifying issues, outlining options and making decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participatory decision-making</li><li>• Citizen advisory panels</li><li>• Open space events</li></ul>
	<b>Involvement</b> People’s concerns inform organisations’ proposed decisions	An ongoing process of engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Workshops</li><li>• Deliberative Polling</li></ul>
	<b>Consultation</b> People’s views are listened to in respect of organisations’ proposed decisions	One-off opportunities for engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focus groups</li><li>• Surveys</li><li>• Public meetings</li></ul>
	<b>Informing</b> Organisations keep people informed of proposed decisions	Providing information <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Newsletters</li><li>• Websites</li><li>• Exhibitions</li></ul>

With reference to the 'ladder', there are significant efforts to inform and consult with the public, through a broad range of public forums and civic groups, making use of a range of both traditional and digital methods.

## Informing



## Consulting



**There are also excellent examples in Aberdeen of effective involvement, collaboration and empowerment. The examples are colour-coded to align with the ladder of engagement, participation and empowerment.**

## Participatory Budgeting

Participatory Budgeting is a democratic approach which supports communities (of locality or interest) to plan and decide how resources are allocated.

There are a number of examples locally where such an approach has been used. There is an opportunity for partners to develop participatory budgeting further in order to establish this as a core methodology for decision making on public resources.

Participatory budgeting is particularly effective in encouraging all varieties of community groups to come forward to debate and discuss their priorities together.

## COLLABORATION

## Community Health Partners

Community partners have been exploring ways to build a wider 'community of health' with two primary care practices in Aberdeen. By strengthening the links between the practices and local charitable and voluntary organisations, health professionals have been better able to link people to helpful activities and support. This supports people to improve their health by linking them with wider supports and resources in their community. One general practitioner particularly values having healthy activity workers in the practice as people can be directly introduced to someone able to provide this wider support.

### Jenny's story:

Jenny was seeing her GP for depression and described her feelings of isolation. The GP introduced her to the healthy activity worker in the practice, thinking that some light exercise might help both with physical fitness and getting out and meeting new people. After some discussion it became clear that she was scared to go out due to anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhood. As well as being provided with information about activities, she was also put in touch with the anti-social behaviour team. Jenny felt that she was listened to and understood, and also realised that her depression was not just because of medical reasons. Jenny felt she had taken some control back and helped her to work out what she could do to make things better for herself. The GP described often seeing people facing complex social situations, and wants to continue to work with both healthy activity organisations and community support providers to support people in finding solutions to these.

EMPOWERMENT





**Bumping Spaces – ABCD Conversation**

As a result of awareness raising about the possibilities of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), local, self-appointed ABCD champions, have supported ABCD Conversations to tease out:

- “What are the ‘networks’ in your community?”
- “What are the areas where people naturally ‘bump into’ each other in your community?”;
- “What are you really passionate about that you would like to share with others in your community?”
- “What would you like to learn from others in your community?”

EMPOWERMENT

**Community of interest: women involved in the Justice System**

A range of activities take place in the Connections Women’s Centre for and with women involved in the Justice System, aimed at supporting women to more positive outcomes. A ‘Women’s Forum’ comprising users of the Centre meets to discuss possible future events, and plays a key role in the development of the Centre.

The Centre provides a much needed meeting space for women who have been harmed by domestic abuse along with a range of other services.

The Women’s Forum discusses future plans and activities that are relevant to the women. Forum participants have been full of enthusiasm and have identified various activities they would like to pursue and get involved in such as fund raising activities and days out. They have discussed various craft making projects to make items to sell (for charity), and would like to explore options to sell items made via summer/ Christmas fayres.

EMPOWERMENT

**Northfield Total Place**

Northfield Total Place is a place based approach that seeks to improve outcomes for the local community in the Northfield, Middlefield, Cummings Park, Heathryfold and Mastrick neighbourhoods of Aberdeen. The approach involves community planning partners, community organisations and local citizens working together to identify priorities and put in place solutions, using the best available resources, to meet the unique needs of the local people within the area.

The approach has been successful in connecting people locally. Local people are more empowered to determine and deliver the best for their community, and Northfield Academy has increased learning experiences for young people through partnership working.

EMPOWERMENT

**Community Driven Engagement – Tillydrone Network**

Tillydrone Network was established by Aberdeen City Council around 15 years ago. The Network has continued to grow and flourish, and is run and managed by its community members, with public sector support from the community support fund. The Network is a driving force in terms of identifying community issues and priorities and helping to raise the profile of these priorities to be addressed.

SELF DETERMINATION



**Our vision for the future**

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 sets out the legal rights and responsibilities around community participation in public sector organisations. However, our vision is for this level of participation to be the expected standard. Communities should not have to call on the legal procedures the Act requires in order to participate, rather it should be woven into the everyday operation of partner organisations.

The case studies show that it is possible to work with high engagement and to support and respect empowerment. While informing and consulting will remain an important foundation for transparency and openness, the strategic ambition is for collaboration and empowerment to become the norm in all communities throughout the city.

This requires a universal commitment to using processes that allow everyone to be heard. It is fully recognised that some communities vary in their preparedness and confidence to become empowered and will ‘need to be empowered

to be empowered’. This will require deliberate time and effort to be devoted towards supporting people in the least heard communities to become empowered (appendix three identifies the wide range of organisations who are involved in actively reaching out to individuals and groups at risk of discrimination and disadvantage).

Evolving towards an increasingly collaborative and empowerment culture will take time. People vary in their willingness to embrace change and new ways of living and working. The legislation raises many questions for many people, and many of the answers will require to be negotiated by those involved at a local level. Some people in some communities and some people in some organisations may perceive these changes as a risk rather than an opportunity. Public authorities will continue to have statutory responsibilities that they have to fulfil. The evolution of collaboration and empowerment will therefore be a journey rather than an event.



## How we will know things are working

A strategy that is focused on engagement, participation and empowerment must be implemented in a manner that is consistent with its own values – it cannot be delivered through diktat or coercion!

Therefore the first indication of progress will be the successful development of an agreed implementation plan, created using collaborative and empowering methods by those who will be required to implement it. The implementation plan will require content relating to communication, actions and evaluation.

The implementation plan will need to be built around the strategic objectives, giving consideration to methods to:

- engage people and obtain their participation
- ensure seldom heard voices are equally sought and heard
- measure improvement resulting from collaboration and empowerment
- empower staff to work in a collaborative and empowering way
- help people see the difference their involvement has made

The second indication will be the collation and sharing of every public authority's point of contact for participation requests to facilitate coordination across organisations in Aberdeen (appendix four).

Community Planning Aberdeen has a vital role to play in the facilitation and coordination of the strategy's implementation.

## For more information about this work

Community Planning Aberdeen is a formal partnership by which organisations in Aberdeen City work together and with the community to plan and deliver better services which make a real difference to people's lives.

**<http://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk>**  
**Email: [communityplanning@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:communityplanning@aberdeencity.gov.uk)**



## Strategy Development Group

This strategy was developed by a working group of representatives from:

**Aberdeen City Council**  
**Aberdeen Civic Forum**  
**Aberdeen City Health & Social Care Partnership**  
**Aberdeen Community Council Forum**  
**Aberdeen Council of Voluntary Organisations**  
**Castlehill & Pittodrie Community Council**  
**Community Renewal**  
**NHS Grampian**  
**Police Scotland**  
**Scottish Fire & Rescue**

with the participation of colleagues from across these organisations and additional input from:

**Advocacy Service Aberdeen**  
**Community Food Initiative North East**  
**Grampian Regional Equality Council**  
**Inspire**  
**Northfield Total Place Strategic Board**  
**South Locality Leadership Group**  
**Station House Media Unit**  
**University of Aberdeen**  
**VSA**





## Appendix One

### Policy and legislative context

In November 2010, the Scottish Government established the 'Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services', also known as 'the Christie Commission' to develop recommendations for the future delivery of public services in Scotland.

A key finding of the Christie Commission was that public services should be built around people and communities, their needs, aspirations, capacities and skills, and that work should be done to help build up their autonomy and resilience.

The Commission recommended that a proposed 'Community Empowerment' bill should make sure that community participation is embedded in the design and delivery of services throughout Scotland.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act received Royal Assent in July 2015 and it provides a legislative framework to promote and encourage community participation and empowerment, including:

- Placing 'Community Planning Partnerships' on a statutory level and requiring specific duties from them in the planning and delivery of local outcomes, and the involvement of community bodies at all stages of community planning.
- Providing ways for communities to have a more proactive role in having their views heard and play a greater role in shaping how public services are planned, designed and delivered.
- Enabling Scottish Ministers to require Scottish public authorities to promote and facilitate the participation of members of the public in the decisions and activities of the authority, including in the allocation of its resources.
- Extending the community 'Right to Buy' to all of Scotland, including urban and rural areas and improving related procedures. This includes introducing a new provision for community bodies to purchase land which is abandoned, neglected or causing harm to the environmental wellbeing of the community, where the owner is not willing to sell that land (as long as the purchase is in the public interest and compatible with the achievement of sustainable development of the land).

- Providing community bodies with a right to request to purchase, lease, manage or use land and buildings belonging to Local Authorities, Scottish public bodies or Scottish Ministers. This includes a 'presumption of agreement' to requests, unless there are reasonable grounds for refusal would then have to be explained.

In the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act, participation rights are given to community controlled bodies such as community councils, incorporated bodies, formal groups with a written constitution or loosely associated groups without. In each case such bodies are expected to have similar characteristics in common:

- They will relate to a defined community.
- The majority of members of the body will be members of that community.
- The body will be open to and controlled by members of that community.
- They will be able to state the body's aims and purposes, including the promotion of a benefit for that community.
- The funds and assets of the body are to be used for the benefit of that community.

The Act also gives community bodies the right to work with all public sector organisations to help improve outcomes. Outcomes are defined as the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that result from what the organisation makes, offers or provides. For example, community bodies might discuss with service providers how they could better meet the needs of users, to offer volunteers to support a service or even propose to take over the delivery of the service themselves.

There are other pieces of legislation that also require public bodies to engage with and involve members of communities in particular public services and functions (For example the Public Bodies (Joint Working) Scotland Act). The intention of this strategy is to provide a consistent model/framework for such engagement, which can be used as appropriate and relevant to the situation.

## Appendix Two

### Community Planning Aberdeen partners

At the date of writing this strategy the community planning partners in Aberdeen City are:

- Aberdeen City Council
- ACVO
- Aberdeen Civic Forum
- North East Scotland College
- Police Scotland
- NHS Grampian
- Aberdeen City Integration Joint Board (Health & Social Care Partnership)
- University of Aberdeen
- The Robert Gordon University
- Scottish Enterprise
- Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
- Skills Development Scotland
- North-East of Scotland Transport Partnership



Appendix Three

People at risk of being seldom heard

• People at risk of being marginalised

People with lived experience of being in care

People with lived experience of the criminal justice system includes

Apex  
Families Outside  
Integrate Aberdeen  
Sacro

People with lived experience of housing challenge

Aberdeen Foyer  
Cyrenians  
Shelter Aberdeen

People with lived experience of literacy challenge

Aberdeen Dyslexia Learning Centre  
Adult Learning Team ACC  
ESOL (people for whom English is not their first language)

People with lived experience of mental health challenge includes

3rd Sector Mental Health Providers Forum  
Cairns Counselling  
Healthy Minds  
MHA (ACIS & ACIS Youth)  
Momentum  
Pathways  
SAMH  
SHMU

People with lived experience of poverty

Aberdeen City Food Bank Partnership  
Aberdeen Cyrenians  
AHEAD Partnership (CFINE)  
Bethany Christian Trust  
CAB  
Cash in Your Pocket Partnership  
Employability  
Fairshare  
Grampian Credit Union  
Grampian Housing  
Instant Neighbour  
Langstaine Housing  
Lighthouse Support Centre  
NESCU  
Pathways  
SCARF (Fuel Poverty)

St Machar Parent Support  
Tenants First  
The Trussell Trust  
Training Providers Forum

People with lived experience of problems associated with alcohol or drugs

People with lived experience of refugee status

ACVO TSI  
Community Planning Partners

People with lived experience of unpaid care

Alzheimer’s Scotland  
Care and Support Providers (CASPA) Forum  
VSA  
VSA Young Carers Group

• The Nine Protected Characteristics

1. Age

Aberdeen City Youth Council  
Aberdeen Foyer  
Aberdeen over 60’s social club  
Aberdeen University Students association  
Befriend a Child  
Care and Repair Aberdeen  
Castlehill Housing Association  
Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)  
City Youth Groups  
Cyrenians  
EncourAGE Dyce  
Footprints Connect  
Grampian Regional Equality Council (GREC)  
Grampian Senior Citizens Forum  
i-connect  
Intergenerational Network  
NESCO: Aberdeen College Students Association  
North East Scotland Equality Network (NESEN)  
Older Peoples Monitoring Group, Froghall  
Pupil Voice  
Respected and Included Group (0-25 yrs) ACVO  
RGU Students Association  
Silver City Surfers  
Scottish Youth Parliament  
Sunrise Partnership

2. Religion and Belief

Aberdeen for a Fairer World  
Aberdeen Interfaith Group  
Aberdeen Moslem and Islamic Centre (AMIC)  
Aberdeen Presbytery

GREC  
Individual faith Organisations (120+ in the city)  
NESEN  
New Multi-faith Forum  
Thai Buddharam Temple

3. Disability

Aberdeen Action on Disability  
Aberdeen Adult Asperger’s and Autism Support Group  
Aberdeen and District Cerebral Palsy Association  
Aberdeen and District Disabled Multi-sports Coaching Team  
Archway  
Blackwood Housing Association  
Bon Accord Access Panel  
Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)  
Cornerstone, Turning Point,  
Disability Positive  
Future Choices  
GREC  
Individual Disability organisations:  
Inspire, C-Change, North East Sensory Service (NESS)  
Learning Disability Group of Aberdeen  
MeToo  
PAMIS  
NESEN  
New Disability Cross Sector Forum  
Shop mobility

4. Race

Aberdeen Hindu Association  
Aberdeen International Centre  
Aberdeen Learning ESOL (English for speakers of other languages)  
Aberdeen Multicultural Centre  
Aberdeen Sikh Sangat Charity  
Aberlour Play Rangers: Gypsy Traveller Children  
BEMIS: Gathered Together Project  
Chinese School  
Ethnic Minority Forum  
Grampian Gypsy/Traveller Interagency Group  
GREC  
Integrate Grampian  
Nepalese Himalayan Association  
NESEN  
NHS Ethic Minority Users Forum  
Polish Association Aberdeen  
Polish Sunny School  
Pool of registered Interpreters/Translators from ACC/GREC

5. Marriage and Civil Partnership

CAB  
Grampian Women’s Aid  
GREC  
Relate  
Stonewall

6. Pregnancy and Maternity

Baby Centre Community Aberdeen  
CAB  
Choices Aberdeen  
GREC  
Homestart

7. Gender Reassignment

GREC  
NESEN  
North East LGBT Development Group  
T-Folk

8. Sex Equality

Aberdeen Women’s Alliance (AWA)  
CAB  
Grampians Women’s Aid  
GREC  
NESEN  
RASANE: Rape & Abuse Support

9. Sexual Orientation

CAB  
Gay Men’s Health  
GREC  
LGBT Staff networks and student associations  
LGBT Zone Youth Group: Ellie Hepburn ACC  
NESEN  
North East LGBT Development Group  
Stonewall

- **Other support to be aware of:**
  - Also everyone has access to EHRC – Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland and their helplines
  - Advocacy Service Aberdeen (ASA)

Advocacy Service Aberdeen is a local third sector organisation supporting people to express their views and participate in decision making. ASA has projects specialising in working with the following groups of people:

- Carers
- Children with additional support needs
- Older people
- People with learning disabilities
- People with mental health issues
- Victims of Domestic Abuse

Independent advocacy is about speaking up for an individual or group.

Independent Advocacy is a way to help people have a stronger voice and to have as much control as possible over their own lives. Independent Advocacy organisations are separate from organisations that provide other types of services. An independent advocate will not make decisions on behalf of the person/group they are supporting. The independent advocate helps the person/group to get the information they need to make real choices about their circumstances and supports the person/group to put their choices across to others. An independent advocate may speak on behalf of people who are unable to do so for themselves. (Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance SIAA)

### Contact details

**Advocacy Service Aberdeen**  
Aberdeen Business Centre, Willowbank Road,  
ABERDEEN AB11 6YG  
Tel 01224 332314

**Advocacy Service Aberdeen**  
Royal Cornhill Hospital, Cornhill Road,  
ABERDEEN AB25 2ZH  
Tel 01224 557912

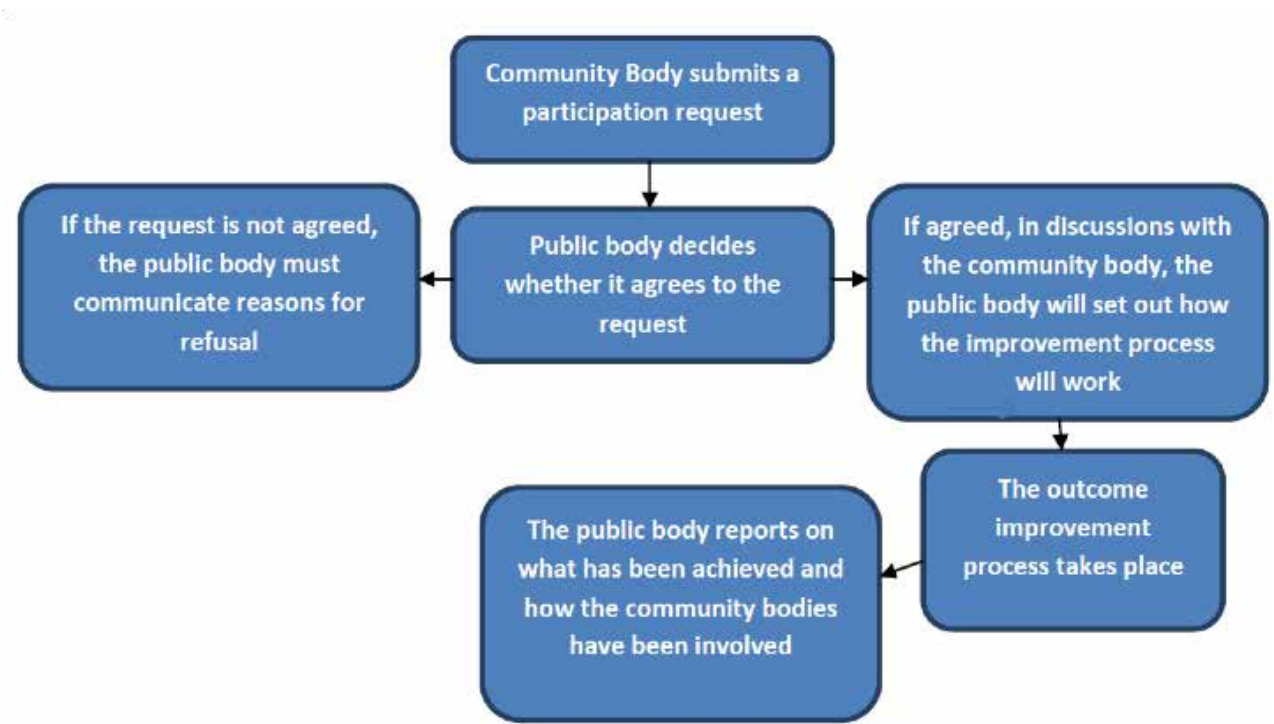
[www.advocacy.org.uk](http://www.advocacy.org.uk)  
[asa@advocacy.org.uk](mailto:asa@advocacy.org.uk)

## Appendix Four Participation requests

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 requires every public sector organisation to have a process for receiving and responding to participation requests.

Community Planning Aberdeen provides an opportunity for partner organisations to create and encouraging a consistent way of working across all community planning organisations and services.

The regulations and guidance for participation requests is currently out for consultation. The expected process is shown here:



Every community planning partner organisation will need to develop and communicate:

- The point of contact for community bodies making a participation request
- The point of contact for other public sector authorities where a multi-agency approach is required
- A range of accessible ways to make contact
- A variety of access points offering different levels of support
- The policy and set of processes in place that identify the appropriate decision-making person or group(s) within the organisation who will co-produce an outcome improvement process with the community body and/or liaise with other public sector organisations if a multi-agency approach is required



