

PE2198/A: Establish a standardised and fair public participation process for all Scottish councils

Scottish Government written submission, 27 November 2025

Does the Scottish Government consider the specific ask[s] of the petition to be practical or achievable? If not, please explain why.

Requiring all local authorities in Scotland to adopt, within a specified timeframe, a set of minimum standards for public participation processes (questions, deputations, petitions) that ensure such processes are accessible, transparent, fair, inclusive and consistent across Scotland would require changes to legislation. This could be feasible, however the Scottish Government does not have any current data to assess whether this would be practical or desirable to mandate across all local authorities.

The [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#) outlines a number of statutory duties local authorities need to meet with regard to public participation processes.

Local authorities are entirely separate entities from the Scottish Government. Their powers are set out in statute and, it is up to each local authority to manage its day-to-day business, tailored to local needs, ensuring all statutory duties are met. The Scottish Government has committed to respecting local government's democratic mandates as part of the Verity House Agreement and believes that locally elected representatives are best placed to consider what works well in their local community. It would be a matter for local government to consider whether standards for public participation processes are required over and above what the Community Empowerment Act enforces. Ministers would consider any proposals that local government or COSLA, as the national association of Scottish Councils, made on this. You may wish to take this proposal to COSLA for their consideration.

To designate a new or existing body to oversee and monitor compliance with such standards could be achievable but, identifying the required resource and budget is essential to make this approach practical.

There is currently no single organisation or body that provides oversight of either the quality or impact of participatory engagements undertaken by governments. In 2024, consideration was given to expand the [National Participatory Budgeting Strategic Group's](#) remit and function to oversee democratic innovations undertaken by the Scottish Government. However, this work is paused due to a lack of resource and capacity to provide a secretariat for the group and to provide strategic support.

Establishing a National Centre for Participation in Scotland was a recommendation that the Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Democracy working group (IPDD) endorsed in 2022 to ensure Scotland builds the infrastructure necessary to embed a participatory democracy in Scotland. The IPDD working group could advise on how to organise a central oversight body. The group involved expert practitioners, both domestically and internationally.

There are examples of Centers of Expertise in other governments, such as France, which has the [Institute for Dialogue and Citizen Participation](#). The French Government requires teams to engage with this Centre when their participation plans reach a certain level of public engagement.

The Open Government team are considering how and who could develop a national strategy for public participation as part of Scotland's next Open Government Action Plan (2026 -2030).

What, if any, action the Scottish Government is currently taking to address the issues raised by this petition and is any further action being considered that will achieve the ask[s] of this petition?

A range of empowerment methods are already available in Scotland to support implementation of standards for public participation that align with open government values.

As part of the Open Government Partnership Scottish Government has produced [progress reports](#) on the Open Government Action Plan 2021-2025 that outline key actions being taken that address the issues raised by this petition. COSLA representatives have been a key partner throughout. Open Government will continue to work with COSLA to ensure that improvements to public participation can become widespread.

In 2022, the Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Democracy (IPDD) working group published its [recommendations](#) on how Scottish Government could deliver on its commitments to embed participatory and deliberative processes in its work. These recommendations outline a set of values, principles and next steps that would support implementation of standards for public participation across local authorities.

In January 2025 Scottish Government published a report [Public participation in policymaking: exploring and understanding impact](#). The research project examined how public participation can have meaningful impact on policy making. Recommendations set out in this report reinforce the recommendations of the IPDD working group.

Further guidance has been published in collaboration with civil society to support high-quality public participation. The [Participation Handbook](#) was published in March 2024 – developed for SG officials but relevant to public bodies.

In 2024, Scottish Government published [guidance for the payment of expenses and compensation](#) for time for people taking part in participatory processes – this will minimise financial barriers to involvement and is of particular importance for inclusively involving marginalised groups.

Public services play a vital role in delivering for children, young people and their communities and the Scottish Government are committed to working in collaboration with partners in the public service to deliver a revolution in children's rights. Full realisation of children's rights requires proactivity on the part of all public authorities, not only services or those working directly with children and young people. The Scottish Government is working to support workforces to ensure they can implement

a children's human rights approach (which includes participation) in practice, every day so that children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.

Statutory guidance has been published to support public authorities in the implementation and operation of their duties under [Part 2](#) and [Part 3](#) (section 18) of the UNCRC Act as necessary. The statutory guidance aims to ensure all public authorities are aware of their duties and how to fulfil them.

There is also non-statutory guidance and resources to help public bodies take a children's human rights based approach: [The Right Way hub](#) (run by the Scottish Youth Parliament); [Children's Rights Skills and Knowledge Framework](#); [Decision-making: children and young people's participation](#).

A [Children's Rights Skills and Knowledge Framework](#) was launched to further build the capacity of public authorities to take a children's human rights approach.

The Open Government team are considering how and who could develop a national strategy for public participation as part of Scotland's next Open Government Action Plan (2026 -2030).

Scottish Government has committed to developing a Trust and Transparency Strategy through the Open Government National Action Plan 2026-2030. Through COSLA, local authorities will be able to support the development of this strategy. There is an opportunity for the strategy to provide support for local authorities in adopting standards for accessible, transparent, fair, inclusive, and consistent participatory practice.

As well as the above, the [National Standards for Community Engagement](#) are good-practice principles designed to support and inform the process of community engagement, and improve what happens as a result. The Standards, originally launched in 2005 were updated in 2016 to ensure that they were fit for purpose to support the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. The Standards continue to be a key resource in the wider work supporting and promoting community engagement and community development in Scotland.

In 2017 the Scottish Government introduced [Participation Requests](#), Part 3 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 to provide a mechanism for community groups to have greater involvement in, and influence over, decisions and services that affect their lives. A [review](#) of participation requests was published on 31 March 2025 and found that they have encouraged Public Service Authorities such as local authorities to be more accessible and transparent by using alternative engagement methods before a formal legislative route needs to be explored. The review identified the need for better understanding of their use and a set of participation request principles will be created.

The Scottish Government also supports [participatory budgeting](#) as a tool for community empowerment, which helps to build on the wider development of participatory democracy in Scotland. The Scottish Government continues to fund COSLA to help local authorities reach the target of having at least 1% of their budget subject to participatory budgeting.

The [Democracy Matters](#) process which is being led jointly with COSLA is designing new arrangements which strengthen community decision making at a more local

level. Removing barriers to participation and ensuring everyone who wants to can have their voice heard. A blueprint outlining proposed reforms will be published before the end of this parliament.

Open Government