



Submission to the Public Consultation on Draft Strategic Policy Committee Scheme 2019 - 2024

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Introduction

Carlow Public Participation (PPN) was established in October 2014 under the Directive of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and in accordance with legislation in the Local Government Reform Act 2014 (Section 46).

The PPN is an independent organisation and is a framework for public engagement and participation with sustainability and wellbeing at its core. The aim of this structure is to facilitate and enable public organisations operating within the wider community to articulate and give voice to a diverse range of views, issues and interests within the local government system.

Carlow PPN currently represents 405 registered community and voluntary, social inclusion and environmental groups across the county.

The PPN welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the new Strategic Policy Scheme. This submission is being made on behalf of Carlow PPN Representatives and Secretariat Members.

Role of Strategic Policy Committees

As stated in the draft scheme 'A key role for SPCs will be to focus on strategic issues and in taking a strategic overview of relevant policy areas in the wider context'.

For this to be achieved, the PPN strongly recommends that the Workplan for all SPCs is set out in a strategic manner. It is also imperative that the members of each SPC fully understand that the focus is a strategic and not operational.

Structure

Housing, Community and Wellbeing SPC

1. The PPN is concerned that 'Sports' has not been identified within the remit of this SPC and recommends this for inclusion
2. The PPN is concerned that 'Health' has not been specifically identified within the remit of this SPC and recommends this for inclusion
3. The PPN recommends 'Public Participation' or 'Citizen Engagement' is included in the remit of this SPC also, given the local authorities responsibility for supporting Comhairle na nOg, Age Friendly, the PPN and other participatory structures for Citizens

Membership

The PPN is very disappointed to find the allocation of PPN seats reduced from 12 seats to 9 particularly when 'a commitment to the fostering of social inclusiveness and equality' is stated in the draft scheme. This reduction will have a severe impact on the voice of the PPN and because of this requests the following changes: -

- An addition of a community seat on the Planning, Environment, Climate Action, Energy and Agriculture SPC
- An addition of a community seat on the Transportation and Infrastructure SPC

- Change the PPN environmental seat on the Culture, Libraries and Digital Development, Tourism, Enterprise Support and Economic Development SPC to a community seat
- Change the PPN environmental seat on the Housing, Community and Wellbeing SPC to a community seat
- An addition of a social inclusion seat on the Culture, Libraries and Digital Development, Tourism, Enterprise Support and Economic Development

Committee	PPN Environment	PPN Community	PPN Social Inclusion	Total PPN
Planning, Environment, Climate Action, Energy and Agriculture	1	2		3
Transportation and Infrastructure	1	2		3
Housing, Community and Wellbeing		2	1	3
Culture, Libraries and Digital Development, Tourism, Enterprise and Economic Development		2	1	3

The PPN is committed to providing high quality community and voluntary, social inclusion and environmental representation to Carlow County Council but will find it difficult to fill environmental seats as stated in the draft scheme (1 seat per SPC) as membership of the Environmental College is very low (11 member groups). Therefore, the changes recommended above are vital for the PPN to achieve its objective and purpose.

Meetings

As all SPC members are representative of their nominating group/organisation it is important that they can consult with their nominating body ahead of SPC meetings and can report back to them in a timely fashion. To facilitate this the SPC Agenda should be circulated two months in advance of the meeting. This is particularly important for PPN representatives on SPCs as they are there to represent the PPN as a whole and it is important that they have the opportunity to consult with their Linkage Group ahead of SPC meetings.

SPCs usually meeting on a quarterly basis and as such a considerable period of time will pass until the minutes of the meeting are approved for circulation. An agreed brief report should be made available for members to circulate to their nominated group/organisation within 1-2 weeks of the meeting taking place.

As SPC's are required to be strategically focused, Agendas need to be set in this manner.

Training

The PPN welcomes the training provision set out in the draft SPC scheme. The PPN recommends this provision should include appropriate training on:

- Induction to SPCs; including Terms of Reference, Workplan and the processes and procedures of the SPCs

- Effective meetings and their hallmarks
- Briefings on relevant policy; including the reform of Local Government
- Workshops on the policy remit of SPCs
- Briefing on the requirements of the Lobbying Act 2015 / Transparency Code

A Training Officer/Official within the Council should be identified as a direct contact for all members.

The PPN feels that this provision is an enabling measure to best support all members of the SPC in fulfilling their respective roles and will result in quality outcomes for Carlow County Council and SPC members.

Regulations of Lobbying – Lobbying Act 2015 / Transparency Code

The draft scheme can be strengthened here by providing detail on what is required for the SPC's to operate in compliance with the Transparency Code and to outline the responsibilities of each SPC Chairperson in relation to operating in compliance with the Transparency Code.

Conclusion

Carlow PPN is committed to the SPC process, its purpose and objectives and in order for PPN Representatives to carry out their role, the following needs to be noted.

As stated in CVSP1/2014, 2.11, it is the role and responsibility of the Local Authority to support the PPN where Local Authorities will:

-recognise the right and responsibilities of Representatives
-ensure that engagement with the public really is participative
-ensure user-friendly and easily accessible structures and processes

The PPN looks forward to working with all members of each SPC in the future.