



MEMBERS HANDBOOK

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Welcome and Introduction



Welcome to Carlow Public Participation Network! This handbook has been produced by Carlow PPN Secretariat, which is a voluntary committee elected from the PPN membership to oversee the running of the PPN. The Secretariat is delighted that your group/organisation has joined the PPN and looks forward to working with you to further the needs of local communities across Carlow.

The purpose of this handbook is to provide you with an overview of Carlow Public Participation Network. It will assist members to understand the role and functioning of the PPN and aims to ensure that you can participate fully in giving Carlow communities a strong voice in local government.

The members of Carlow Secretariat are:

- **Ian Sewell, Carlow Environmental Network - Environmental College**
- **Joe Butler, Carlow Older Persons Forum - Community & Voluntary College**
- **Lynda Stacey, Bagenalstown Family Resource centre - Municipal District of Muinebheag**
- **Damien Howard, Myshall Muintir Na Tire - Municipal District of Tullow**
- **Caroline Dargan, Carlow Community First Responders - Municipal District of Carlow**
- **Jackie Meally, Local Link - Community & Voluntary College**
- **Vacant - Environmental College**
- **Vacant - Social Inclusion College**
- **Vacant - Social Inclusion College**

1. CONTEXT

1.1 ESTABLISHMENT OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORKS

The Working Group on Citizen Engagement was established by the Government in September 2013. The role of this Group was to make recommendations to ensure more extensive and diverse input by citizens into local government. The Group recommended that a *“Public Participation Network” be established in each local authority area to enable the public to take an active formal role in relevant policy making and committees of the Local Authority*”.

In response to this recommendation, Public Participation Networks were set up in each local authority area under Section 46 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014. The aim was to provide a *“framework for public participation in local government by which citizens and communities will be encouraged and supported to participate in the decision-making processes of the local authority”*.

1.2. ROLE OF THE PPN

The PPN provides a new way for communities to engage with local government and ensures that they have a say in how Carlow County Council works. The PPN is the recognised link through which the Council connects with the community & voluntary, social inclusion & environmental sectors in Carlow. Specifically, the role of the PPN is to:

- provide a mechanism for the Council to consult with the public on new plans/strategies, policies, services and supports.
- act as a platform for groups/organisations to develop policies and positions on issues of common interest and to advocate for these with the Council.
- facilitate the participation and representation of the community, voluntary, social inclusion and environment sectors on Council committees.
- strengthen the capacity of groups /organisations to contribute positively to the community in which they reside/participate.
- provide networking opportunities and act as a hub around which information and ideas are shared.

2. PPN STRUCTURES AND DECISION-MAKING

2.1 STRUCTURE

The PPN is a representative body for groups and organisation from across County Carlow. As such, it does not represent the views of individuals. Membership is only open to groups and organisations from the community and voluntary, social inclusion and environment sectors. It is structured on two levels:

a) at a County level (called the "Plenary")

Currently, there are approximately **344 groups/organisations** registered with Carlow PPN from across the County. These make up the PPN Plenary.

b) at local area level (called Municipal District PPNs)

When registering with the PPN, groups/organisations are automatically assigned to the Municipal District in which they are located. There are three Municipal Districts in Carlow PPN:

- Municipal District of Carlow
- Municipal District of Muinebheag
- Municipal District of Tullow

Sectors

The PPN is also structured into 3 broad sectors. When registering, group/organisations are asked to self-select into 1 of these sectors, as follows:

- Community & Voluntary Sector
- Social Inclusion Sector
- Environment Sector

Diagram 1.1, below, provides a diagrammatic representation of the PPN structure.

2.2 PPN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

The **Plenary** brings together all PPN member groups and organisations. It is the decision-making body of the PPN and holds meetings at least twice per year. Decisions of the Plenary are implemented by the Secretariat.

2.3 PPN SECRETARIAT

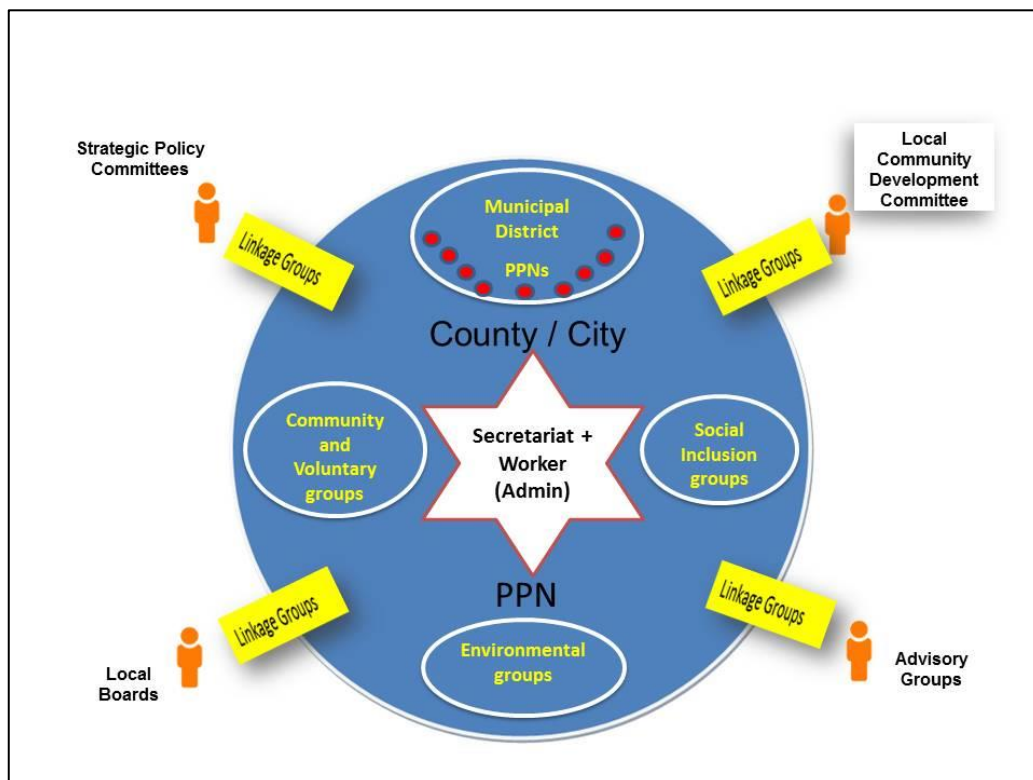
The Secretariat is the organising body of the PPN. There are 8 seats on Carlow Secretariat, comprising 2 representatives from each of the 3 Sectors and 1 from each of the Municipal Districts.

The role of the Secretariat is to:

- a) Facilitate the implementation of decisions of the PPN Plenary
- b) Ensure the proper functioning of the PPN and co-ordinate its activities.
- c) Communicate extensively and regularly with all PPN members and disseminate information concerning PPN activities as widely as possible.
- d) Work closely with the Resource Worker to support him/her to deliver PPN objectives.
- e) Ensure that PPN representatives represent the views, interests and priorities of the PPN and not those of their own group/organisation.

A Facilitator is appointed from within the Secretariat on a quarterly basis and is alternated to ensure a gender balance is maintained within the role. As all Secretariat members have equal status, the Facilitator's primary role is to conduct meetings in an orderly and productive manner.

1.1 Diagrammatic representation of PPN Structure



3. INFLUENCING COUNCIL POLICY AND DECISION-MAKING

3.1 LINKAGE GROUPS

Your group/organisation is encouraged to join one or more of Carlow PPN Linkage Groups. These are thematic sub-groups of the PPN which correspond to the services and programmes delivered by the Council and other agencies in the County. Linkage Groups bring together PPN members that have either a remit or an interest in these services/programmes.

Linkage Groups provide a mechanism for the PPN to influence policy and decision-making. It does this by electing representatives from Linkage Groups to sit on Council committees and other fora on its behalf. Through these representatives, the PPN participates in shaping policies that affect Carlow communities, and is kept up-to-date with developments in the Council and other organisations. Representatives take direction from, and provide feedback to, Linkage Groups in a manner which ensures openness and accountability. For more information on representatives, see Section 3.2.

There are 6 PPN Linkage Groups in Carlow, feeding into the following fora:

- **Health & Well-being Linkage Group** which feeds into: Housing, Community & Wellbeing Strategic Policy Committee and South East Regional Drug & Alcohol Task Force
- **Culture and Amenity Linkage Group** which feeds into: Culture, Libraries & Digital Development, Tourism, Enterprise & Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee and Carlow Tourism Board
- **Community Linkage Group** which feeds into: Community & Voluntary College of the Local Community Development Committee, Housing, Community & Wellbeing Strategic Policy Committee and Joint Policing Committee
- **Social Inclusion Linkage Group** which feeds into: Social Inclusion College of the Local Community Development Committee and Housing, Community & Wellbeing Strategic Policy Committee
- **Environment and Infrastructure Linkage Group** which feeds into: Environment College of the Local Community Development Committee and Planning, Environmental, Climate & Biodiversity Action, Energy & Agriculture Strategic Policy Committee and Transportation & Infrastructure Strategic Policy Committee
- **Economy and Industry Linkage Group** which feeds into: Culture, Libraries & Digital Development, Tourism, Enterprise & Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee and Carlow Town Development Forum

3.2 LINKAGE GROUP MEMBERS AND REPRESENTATIVES

a) Membership

By becoming a member of a PPN Linkage Group, your group/organisation can participate in the day-to-day functioning of the PPN in the following ways:

- nominate candidates in elections to elect PPN representatives onto Council and other committees
- vote in the elections to select PPN representatives
- engage with the regular updates from PPN representatives
- participate in Council consultation processes
- develop agreed positions with other Linkage Group members on matters of interest
- network and share information and ideas with other Linkage Group members

b) Representatives

The role of PPN representatives is an active and participative one which requires commitment and time. Representatives are required to represent the views of their Linkage Group as a whole, and not their own personal views, nor those of their Municipal District, Sector or Nominating Body.

Representatives are required to communicate regularly with their Linkage Groups to ensure they are bringing agreed and relevant issues to the committee on which they sit. They are also required to report back regularly to Linkage Groups using the standard PPN reporting template. Further information on the rights and responsibilities of PPN representatives can be found in the *Carlow PPN Representatives Charter*, *PPN Policies Document* and *PPN Code of Conduct*.

4. COUNCIL POLICY-MAKING STRUCTURES

4.1 STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE (SPC)

The Council is the decision-making authority of Carlow County Council. It is the task of the SPCs, as committees of the Council, to advise and assist the Council in the development and review of policy. The remit of the SPCs is to deal only with policy matters and, therefore, they are strategic in nature. They have no remit in relation to routine operational matters regarding the delivery of services. The SPC system ensures that Councillors and relevant “sectoral interests”, including the PPN, are involved in the policy making process from an early stage.

There are 4 SPCs in Carlow County Council, which broadly correspond to the Council's services:

- Planning, Environmental, Climate and Biodiversity Action, Energy and Agriculture
- Transportation and Infrastructure
- Housing, Community and Wellbeing
- Cultural, Libraries and Digital Development, Tourism, Enterprise and Economic Development

4.2 LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES (LCDC)

The aim of the LCDC is to develop, coordinate and implement a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development. Its functions are:

- to prepare the community elements of a 6-year Local Economic and Community Plan
- to oversee the implementation of local and community development programmes that have been approved by the LCDC
- to improve the coordination of public-funded local and community development programmes and to reduce duplication

4.3 OTHER COMMITTEES

Carlow PPN also elects representatives to sit on the following committees:

- Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)
- Local Community Safety Partnership (LCSP)
- Planning, Economic Development, Regeneration, Finance, and ICT SPC
- Transportation, Environment, Emergency Services and Capital Projects SPC
- Community Development, Recreation, Amenity, Sports, Arts & Culture, Libraries, Museum, Heritage SPC
- Housing and Integration SPC
- Carlow Tourism Board
- Carlow Heritage Forum

5. YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1 WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM THE PPN

a) Communication

In order to ensure that the PPN is a strong voice for local communities, it is crucial that all stakeholder communicate well with each other. The Secretariat works hard to ensure that it communicates regularly with members, so that members can participate fully in the activities of the PPN. The PPN website is updated regularly, and e-bulletins are issued monthly to all members with information and updates on a wide range of community related topics and issues.

b) Information, Policies and Procedures

Upon joining the PPN, all new members are invited to attend a PPN Information Session and are provided with the *Carlow PPN Members Handbook*. In addition, the Secretariat has put in place robust policies and procedures to ensure that the PPN functions in an open, transparent and accountable way. These are available to members upon request:

- Secretariat Terms of Reference
- PPN Representatives Charter
- Induction, Training, Expenses and Exit Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Complaints Procedure
- Conflict of Interest
- Thematic Linkage Group Terms of Reference
- Operational Procedures

c) Representative Training

Carlow County Council will deliver a training/induction programme relating to the role and operation of Council Committees i.e., Strategic Policy Committee, Joint Policing Committee and Local Community Development Committee. Representatives will also be facilitated to participate in training and information sessions provided to all PPN members by Carlow PPN.

5.2 YOUR ROLE AS A PPN MEMBER



As a member of the PPN, your group / organisation plays an important part in shaping policies that affects your community. PPN representatives sit on Council committees to represent your views. You are therefore encouraged to stay in touch to ensure your views are heard and that you can participate in shaping the actions and priorities of the PPN.

You can do this by:

- joining a PPN Linkage Group and actively participating in Linkage Group meetings
- regularly checking the emails sent to you by the Co-ordinator
- attending PPN meetings
- staying in touch via social media (PPN website, Facebook and Twitter)
- reading the regular PPN E-Bulletin