



Submission to the Public Consultation

Kerry County Council Draft Strategic Policy Committee Scheme 2019-2024

By

Kerry Public Participation Network

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Introducing County Kerry Public Participation Network

County Kerry Public Participation Network (PPN) was established in July 2014 under the directive of the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government and in accordance with legislation in the Local Government Reform Act 2014 (Section 46). Public Participation Networks were established to be an independent structure that would become the main link through which local authorities connect with the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in a process to facilitate communities to articulate a diverse range of views and interests within the local government system.

County Kerry PPN has 670 registered member groups; some of these groups are networks in their own right. PPN representatives serve as a voice for the community on structures.

Board, Committee, Group or Forum Name
Local Community Development Committee / Local Area Group
Joint Policing Committee
SPC: Economic Dev and Enterprise
SPC: Operations
SPC: Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation
SPC: Quality of Life
Kerry Age Friendly -
Kerry Refugee Resettlement Programme
Local Sports Partnership
Kerry Community Awards
Kerry ETB
Kerry County Childcare Committee

Kerry PPN Representatives strive to ensure that the needs of the community sector are prioritised within local policy processes.

Draft Strategic Policy Committee Scheme 2019-2024

SPC Framework configuration

Kerry PPN accepts that the five proposed SPCs sectors that are represented on the Strategic Policy Committee covers all the Kerry County Council services

1. Economic Development, Enterprise, Tourism and Community SPC
2. Roads, Transportation and Marine SPC
3. Environment, Climate Change and Emergency Planning SPC
4. Housing SPC
5. Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht SPC

That the SPC Scheme is written in **User Friendly Language** and that the paragraph below is rewritten in user friendly language to ensure clarity of purpose.

The primary role of the Strategic Policy Committees is to assist Kerry County Council in the formulation, development and review of policy. The SPC arrangement harnesses the experience and expertise of relevant external bodies and enhance the overall role of Councillors by providing a platform for an input into policy formulation at an early stage.

It is essential that SPC's will continue to have a function in other non-statutory policy fields such as:

- Policy related to development of Work Programmes and the establishment of priorities for particular services.
- Consideration of the needs of people with disabilities in the formulation and implementation of relevant policies.
- The strategic monitoring of Local Authority services
- Integration of sustainability principles to particular services.

These Committees will not have power to decide or determine Council Policy; this power will continue to be a function of the Council acting as a Body. However, if the Strategic Policy Committee system is to work in a meaningful way, it will be important that the Council take full cognisance of the work of the Committees when deciding on policy matters.

The establishment of the proposed new or renamed structured Strategic Policy Committees such as **Environment, Climate Change and Emergency Planning SPC** and **Housing SPC** is a welcome reflection of our changing society and the importance placed on these two very important crisis's that is facing our communities and society as a whole.

'Climate Change: A Cross-Party Consensus for Action' published in March 2019, by the Joint Oireachtas committee on Climate Action. This action plan highlights the importance of making decision and how decisions made today will impact the present and future generations. Chapter 3 outlines very clear recommendations that should be stringently followed and implemented.

*3.3 'Local authorities have significant structures and experience in engaging citizens through their planning functions, particularly local area planning and **as facilitators of the Public Participation Networks (PPNs)**. They can also effectively contribute to climate action in the fulfilment of their existing statutory functions. Climate change considerations should be addressed across all local authority plans, policies and activities including through their existing Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) **and a dedicated new Climate Change SPC for climate action.**'*

*3.4 '**Government must continue its support of Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and PPNs**, financed through the Department of Rural and Community Development, as both offer the potential to act as key drivers of effective local action. However, there is currently no specific mandate for these bodies to address climate change.*

*The Committee recommends that the **PPNs and LCDCs be fully utilized and supported with additional resources to address climate change as part of their remit and to build capacity among communities to carry out projects which directly tackle climate change starting in Budget 2020'***

3.6 *'The Committee recommends: The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment should enable each local authority to **establish or designate a Climate Change Strategic Policy Committee (SPC), to be incorporated into the SPC schemes for each Local Authority after June 2019.** External representation on this SPC should be inclusive of all social, economic and environmental stakeholder groups. (Section 3.3)'*

'Climate Action Plan 2019 – To tackle climate breakdown launched in June 2019

In Chapter 5, **Citizen Engagement, Community Leadership and Just Transition**, it states *"We will engage and empower citizens and communities to take local action by linking to existing and new networks and clustering initiatives, using the NDCA and Local Authority structures. The Climate Action Regional Offices will lead a step-up in climate action within Local Authorities.....The Public Participation Network (PPN) will be leveraged to share information and knowledge, as well as a means to animate local community groups to get involved in climate action initiatives. There are currently approximately 15,000 community organisations registered with 31 PPNs"*

Strategic Policy Committees - Meetings, Procedures and Standing Orders, and some recommendations.

PPNs were developed on the recommendation of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement which reported in late 2013. Volunteer-led organisations make a significant contribution to the social, cultural, economic and environmental fabric of Ireland. The Kerry PPN is at the heart of the community and is the voice of the community and this should be reflected in the importance that is placed on the situation of the **Community** within the SPC Scheme

It is a recommendation that a 6th Strategic Policy Committee be established – **Community and Equality SPC**. It was felt very strongly that the Community element which is included within the Economic Development, Enterprise, Tourism and Community SPC is more like a tag on at the end and contained within a large remit of enterprise, tourism and economic development , it would be completely swamped and would not be given the equal time and space it deserves. According to the Central Statistics Office in 2015 , over 520,000

people volunteer in organisations with an equivalent annual value of €1bn annually (based on minimum wage).

If a 6th SPC **Community and Equality SPC** cannot be established, then maybe consider looking at renaming Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht SPC to include the essential community element which makes up all sectors within our community.

It was acknowledged that the SPC had work in the past and worked well, and when the meetings did take place, it provided an opportunity to present new ideas. However, the last SPC Scheme fell far short on any type of delivery and lead to a lot of frustration by the PPN representatives attending the meetings. Under the new scheme, there needs to be more transparency and more accountability

- Each SPC should have a focused Annual Work plan and that **each SPC should have a PPN standing item on the agenda** so that the representative has an opportunity to feed back at each meeting. This is an essential element in order to ensure citizen participation and engagement. There should be clear measured actions, who needs to be involved and that this is monitored and evaluated at each meeting. The SPC structure should be established in such a proactive manner and after each meeting, the Kerry PPN is issued with written updates that can be put on the Kerry PPN website.
- There should be a clear calendar of meetings at least 4 per year and that these dates are circulated to all the representatives who sit on the SPC's and are highlighted on KCC website and the Kerry PPN website.
- That these dates are adhered to, except in exceptional explained circumstances.
- 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/Thematic Network ahead of SPC meetings.
- All SPC representatives are nominated from various groups / organisations, so it is imperative that they have the opportunity to consult with their nominating body ahead of SPC meetings and be able to report back to them in a timely fashion.

- That clear standing orders are established which include the schedule of meetings, the place of meetings, the notice of meetings and the order of business: all representatives have the opportunity to feed into the agenda and that this along with any supporting documentation is circulated in a timely manner to all.
- **Ban the use of Mobile phones** - Contained within the standing orders would be the use of mobile phones – the feedback from the SPC representatives is that they feel very strongly about the open and disrespectful use of mobile phones in meetings and the coming and going of public representatives: so it needs to be documented that mobile phones cannot be used at a meeting. It displays bad example, little commitment to the process and little or no respect to the other representatives attending the meetings.
- That the Chairs of each SPC are held more accountable for the effective and efficient running of the meeting and the full inclusion and participation of all.
- If a PPN representative does not attend an SPC meeting, the PPN are notified immediately so that this can be followed up on by the PPN.
- This is essential in order to ensure the smooth effective running and outcomes from the SPCS.
- Elements such as the Service Delivery Plan are not included, which SPC is this under?
- **Communication strategy** is drawn up – this will outline the two way flow of information. It has been highlighted by SPC representatives that even after attending meetings, suggestions they have made are not reflected in the minutes and decisions made at the SPC meetings are left and members attending are not informed of the update and due to the time lapse between meetings, this is an issue and they are not afforded with the information that they can bring back to the community groups.
- **On page 11 of the draft SPC Scheme point 4 states** “Nominations from the Community/Voluntary Sector will only be considered by groups registered on the County Register of Community and Voluntary Groups in accordance with the rules of the Register”. **This should read Kerry Public Participation Network Register.**
- On the whole it was felt that less rubber stamping is required, less political grandstanding by counsellors which prevent the effective running of the meetings.

- **Awareness and training** in relation to SPCs should be made available at the earliest stages, it is essential that all members on the SPC's are clearly aware of the representation, the role and remit and how the Kerry PPN is structured.
- Recognition that PPN representatives are **Volunteers**, and that the Local Authority recognises this fact and facilitates the representatives with regards to meeting times to ensure full attendance, participation and engagement.
- **Lobbying Act 2015 – that a Transparency Code** is included in the new SPC Scheme. Many Local Authorities across Ireland include this as standard such as Galway, Cork City Clare and Meath to name some.

That Kerry PPN Representatives Charter, which sets out the role and responsibilities of the PPN's Representatives, is circulated to all members of the SPC to ensure full understanding of the role and participation of a PPN representative on a SPC. This Charter underpins the mutual respect and expected behaviours of all PPN Stakeholders. Kerry PPN representative's term is 5 years with the opportunity of sitting for a second term.

Kerry PPN circulated the KCC Draft SPC scheme to all our member groups encouraging them to engage with this process and called a joint meeting of all PPN Secretariat members and all PPN representatives that sit on various committees in order that they could input into this submission. We also circulated a PPN Representative Feedback sheet and asked all representatives to fill it in : 2 questions were posed - what had worked well and what needed to be improved.

It is widely acknowledged that open and inclusive policy-making increases public participation, enhances transparency and accountability, builds civic capacity and leads to increased buy-in and better decision-making. The PPN structure is designed to be a key player in delivering this vision in Ireland.

We need strong voices to be heard on SPCs and they i.e.

The STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEES need to be formulated and structured in such a transparent accountable manner that there is equal participation, equal engagement and equality across the board.

Attached:

- Kerry Public Participation Network Representative Charter, Role, Rights and Responsibilities of a PPN Representative.
- Feedback template report sheet for the PPN representatives.
- A PowerPoint presentation outlining the role of the PPN to KCC.
- Make Ireland Sustainable for All – Caitriona Rogerson, Coordinator – submission supported by the Kerry PPN.
- Submission regarding the draft Kerry County Council Strategic Policy Committee Scheme from Michael Ewing, Development Officer, Environmental Pillar. Submission supported by the Kerry PPN.