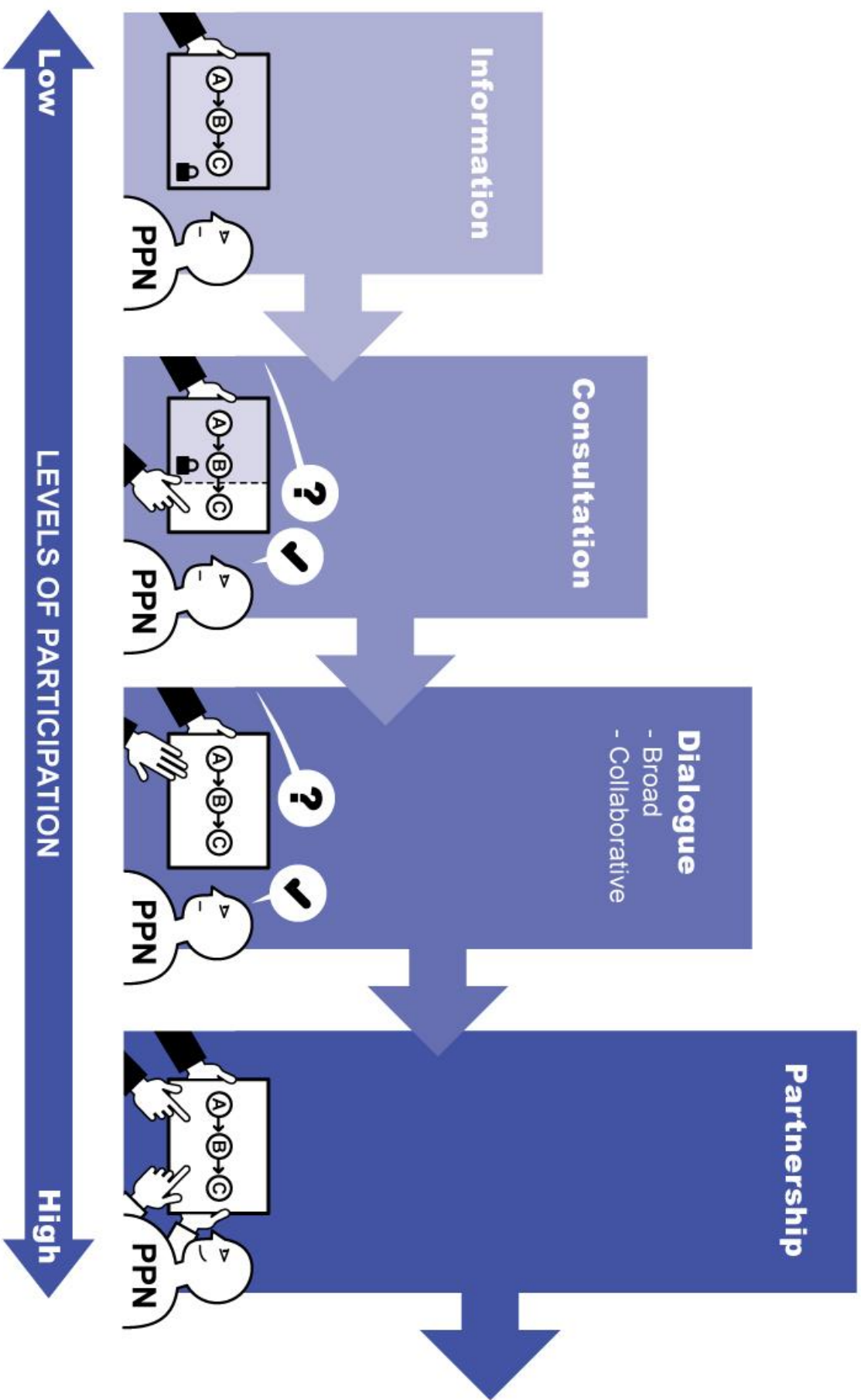




Delivering Deliberative Democracy

PARTICIPATION BY THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORKS IN
LOCAL GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING

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Executive Summary

Since early 2014, the PPNs have evolved, from the initial Introduction Period, through the Development Period to the Consolidation Period (Bourke, 2017) and are now firmly established and recognised as the main conduit by which Local Authorities engage with their communities, with a membership of more than 15,000 organisations from the Community and Voluntary, Social Inclusion and Environmental sectors (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2019). In particular, certain Local Authority structures, such as the Strategic Policy Committees and Local Community Development Committees, must source community representation through the PPNs.

The main way in which PPNs facilitate participation in local democracy is through the nomination and election of representatives on to Local Authority Committees and Boards. The framework for participation recommended by the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government was that developed by the Council of Europe, which follows a progression from least participatory to most participatory (Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government, 2014).

The purpose of this research was to capture how the various PPN stakeholders engaged in the participation processes ‘on the ground’ viewed the application of the principles set out in the Council of Europe Framework to participation by the PPN, both overall and at each stage of the decision-making process. This data can then be used to inform policy on participation in local decision-making to support more active engagement.

A survey, based on the scale of participation set out in the Council of Europe’s Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process and the Council of Europe Guidelines for Civil Participation in Political Decision-making, was developed by *Social Justice Ireland*. As the aim of the survey was to capture the ‘on the ground’ experience of PPN Workers, Representatives and Local Authority staff who engage with Committees and Boards at Local Authority level, other important stakeholders, such as the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, were not invited to participate.

Results

Public Participation Networks (PPNs) are engaging across a range of committees and Boards at local level to influence policies that affect

their Member Groups and their communities. While most respondents felt that the principles of participation were being adhered to, it is interesting to note that an exception was made for the principles statement relating to openness in the decision-making process.

Overall, the responses to our survey indicate agreement or strong agreement that the principles outlined by the Council of Europe are being implemented when it comes to participation at local government level in Ireland. Similarly, a high proportion of respondents felt that the PPNs had moved beyond the 'Information' and 'Consultation' levels of participation, to the Dialogue level for each stage of the decision-making process. There is, however, some work to be done before 'Partnership' can be achieved at all stages of the decision-making process, as this level was indicated by the lowest proportion of respondents for each stage.

It is positive to see that a high proportion of respondents felt that the level of participation across each stage of the decision-making process was at dialogue stage, however there is a significant proportion who responded that participation was still at the lowest level, that the Local Authority provided the information only to the PPN. This is particularly the case for PPN Representatives on the Strategic Policy Committees and the Local Community Development Committees, two important committees which would benefit from a more inclusive approach to community participation.

It is also clear from the responses, that there is variance among and between stakeholder groups as to the level of participation experienced. This is also evident in the comments included by some respondents. This provides both a challenge and an opportunity nationally. Examples of good practice developed in one area may apply equally well to another, acknowledging the local variances necessary to ensure that participation is specific to the community / Local Authority area concerned.

Recommendations

Structural Support - Dialogue

As noted above, the disparity between and among respondent groups presents both a challenge and an opportunity for PPNs and Local Authorities to discuss what is working well in some areas, or for some particular committees, and to develop best practice procedures in partnership. The mainly positive responses of the 'Local Authority Staff' respondents also present an opportunity to explore their approach to the principles and levels of engagement with their

stakeholder colleagues to come to a common understanding. This could take place at a local or a national level, under national oversight of the National PPN Advisory Group and the Department of Rural and Community Development. This would also address the ‘personality effect’ that makes participation dependent on individuals among the stakeholder group, and support a more systemic approach.

Recommendation 1: A dialogue between the Local Authorities and the other PPN Stakeholders to establish practical, best-practice approaches to implementing the principles of participation and working towards increasing partnership across all stages of the decision-making process.

Structural Support – Policy

The data presented in this Report indicates that Local Authority Staff are both broadly in favour of participation generally and strongly of the view that the structures, as currently constituted, lead to a high level of partnership at all stages of the decision-making process. This is not, however, the view of the majority of Representatives. In addition to the dialogue referred to above, a review of participation within the Local Authority structures should be undertaken. This review would focus on whether these structures are really participative, following the Council of Europe’s Framework. To support both this review, and the implementation of any actions that follow, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage should dedicate resources at, at least, Principal Officer grade to work collaboratively with counterparts in the Department of Rural and Community Development to ensure meaningful engagement.

Recommendation 2: Review the Local Authority Structures against the Council of Europe’s Framework and dedicate resources from within the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, of at least Principal Officer grade, to ensure meaningful engagement.

Further Research

This research sought to quantify how selected PPN stakeholders applied the principles of participation and the levels of participation across all stages of the decision-making process, in accordance with the Council of Europe Guidelines (Council of Europe, 2009) and the Report of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government (Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government, 2014). The disparities identified between and among stakeholder groups in their application of these instruments warrants further, qualitative, research with respondents to this survey

indicating their willingness to engage in further conversation on this topic.

Recommendation 3: Further qualitative research to explore best practice solutions.

Introduction

The need for greater public participation is not a new concept. Alinsky (1946) wrote of the disenchantment with American political structures and the restriction of political participation as being “pretty much restricted to the intermittently recurring elections” (p. 210). Alinsky spoke of the democratic programme as consisting of People’s Organisations, inclusive of both the people and their many organisations. His book, which contained ‘By-Laws of the People’s Organization’ [sic] with the purpose of uniting all organisations within the community to find “health, happiness and security through a democratic way of life” (p. 221).

Real participation goes beyond voting (representative democracy) to a situation where people and government work in partnership to co-create infrastructure and services, solve problems and work towards the well-being of all in this generation and the generations to come (deliberative democracy) (Elster, 1998) (Bourke, 2017). This approach demands that power differentials are set aside to make space for views of those who may not traditionally be heard.

In 2014, the Working Group on Citizen Engagement (the Working Group) published its report which recommended the establishment of the Public Participation Networks in each of the 31 Local Authority areas (Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government, 2014). This was achieved through the Local Government Reform Act, 2014 which put Public Participation Networks (PPNs) on a statutory footing¹.

Since early 2014, the PPNs have evolved, from the initial Introduction Period, through the Development Period to the Consolidation Period (Bourke, 2017) and are now firmly established and recognised as the main conduit by which Local Authorities engage with their communities, with a membership of more than 15,000 organisations from the Community and Voluntary, Social Inclusion and Environmental sectors (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2019). In particular, certain Local Authority structures, such as the Strategic Policy Committees and Local Community Development Committees, must source community representation through the PPNs.

The main way in which PPNs facilitate participation in local democracy is through the nomination and election of representatives on to Local Authority Committees and Boards. The framework for

¹ Section 46

participation recommended by the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government was that developed by the Council of Europe, which follows a progression from least participatory to most participatory (Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government, 2014).

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to capture how the various PPN stakeholders engaged in the participation processes 'on the ground' viewed the application of the principles set out in the Council of Europe Framework to participation by the PPN, both overall and at each stage of the decision-making process. This data can then be used to inform policy on participation in local decision-making to support more active engagement.

Methodology

A survey, based on the scale of participation set out in the Council of Europe's Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process and the Council of Europe Guidelines for Civil Participation in Political Decision-making, was developed and reviewed by a member of the *Social Justice Ireland* Academic Advisory Council and an external researcher. This was then uploaded to the online survey platform SurveyMonkey and circulated to all PPN Workers with a request that they circulate it to their respective PPN Secretariat Members, PPN Representatives, and relevant Local Authority staff. A link to the survey was also provided to a member of the City and County Managers Association (CCMA) for circulation to relevant Local Authority staff. As the aim of the survey was to capture the 'on the ground' experience of PPN Workers, Representatives and Local Authority staff who engage with Committees and Boards at Local Authority level, other important stakeholders, such as the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, were not invited to participate.

The survey was active from 15th June 2020 until 31st August 2020 (an extension to the original timeframe of 31st July 2020 was provided due to the interest in engagement). A copy of the survey questionnaire is appended at Appendix 1.

The survey data was then filtered to include complete responses only. The respondent ID numbers were checked to ensure there were no duplicates. A total of 223 complete and unique responses was received, representing at least one response from each of the 31 PPN / Local Authority areas.

Limitations

While every effort was made to encourage participation in this survey, the number of respondents for each stakeholder group reflect a proportion of the full number within that group. The analysis is therefore confined to respondents and cannot be extrapolated to the wider cohort.

Analysis by Local Authority area / PPN is not possible due to low respondent numbers in some areas.

This research is based on quantitative data. While additional comments were sought from respondents who wished to provide them, no qualitative interviews were conducted. These comments, where included, are for illustrative purposes only.

Acknowledgements

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The author would like to thank the PPN Workers, PPN Secretariat Representatives, PPN Representatives on Boards and Committees, Local Authority staff, and others for their time in completing the survey.

Glossary of Terms

There are a broad range of terms and definitions used when talking about PPNs and their work. The following list of terms is extracted from the draft PPN Handbook.

Advisory Group means the PPN National Advisory Group.

Colleges means the Community and Voluntary; Social Inclusion; and Environmental Colleges.

Community refers to a place (such as a neighbourhood or wider area), identity (such as belonging to an ethnic group), or interest (such as a commitment in common with others, for example, disability rights).

Deliberative Democracy means a form of democracy and decision-making in which deliberation, active participation and discussion are key.

The **Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government** oversees the operation and development of the local government system and provides the policy framework within which Local Authorities work and deliver services to the communities that they represent and serve. From July 2017, the policy framework regarding LCDs, LECs and PPNs transferred from the **Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government** to the **Department of Rural and Community Development**. Article 28A of the Irish Constitution recognises the role of local government in providing a forum for the democratic representation of communities and in exercising and performing powers conferred by law.

The **Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD / the Department)** was established in July 2017 to promote rural and community development and to support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland. In relation to the PPNs, the Department is the majority funder, provides the Chair of the National Advisory Group, and has overall responsibility for the development and oversight of the PPNs.

The Elected Council is the policy-making forum of the Local Authority; the Municipal District members make decisions that affect their Municipal District area (where Municipal Districts exist in the Local Authority area). Elected Councils (operating at Local Authority or Municipal District level) exercise 'reserved functions' (meaning that only elected councillors can do these things) across a whole range of areas such as the Local Authority budget, trading, community twinning and so on. The day-to-day management of a Local Authority

is carried out by the executive, i.e. the full-time officials led by the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive has a duty to advise and assist the Elected Council in the exercise of its functions.

JPC (Joint Policing Committee) is a Local Authority Committee comprised of councillors, TDs, the Gardaí and external stakeholders such as PPNs which make policy proposals on policing issues. Section 36 of the Garda Síochána Act provided for the establishment of JPCs in each Local Authority administrative area and as part of the Local Government structures.

LAGs: Local Action Groups

LCDC: Local Community Development Committee – a Local Authority Committee with public and private members that oversees community development programmes in an area including LEADER and SICAP. An LCDC must have at least 5 members elected through the PPNs – 2 Social Inclusion, 2 Community and Voluntary; and 1 Environmental. There should also be a majority of one non-public members compared to public members. The aim of LCDCs is to develop, coordinate and implement clear and integrated approaches to local and community development.

LEADER means the funding programme delivered through the LAGs, which aims to support economic, social and environmental development of rural areas. LEADER is a programme that supports both private enterprise and community groups in delivering projects aimed at improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging the diversification of economic activity in rural areas.

LECP means the **Local Economic and Community Plan** in each economic area. The preparation of the LECP is provided for by the Local Government Reform Act 2014. The purpose of the LECP is to set out the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of the local authority area. The responsibility for the LECP is shared between the LCDC and the Economics SPC.

Linkage Group: A group of PPN Member Groups with an interest in a particular issue who meet to make policy recommendations and work closely with PPN Representatives on relevant Boards or Committees, e.g. Environmental Linkage Group which works with the Climate Action SPC. These are a really important part of the PPN as they feed into the Representatives' mandate.

Local Authorities (LA): City or County Councils. These play a key role in supporting economic development and enterprise at a local level.

Local Government support on the ground is critical to the success of many initiatives which drive local communities. These range from local festivals and events; design of streetscapes and village renewal schemes; support for micro-enterprises, business parks and incubation units; involvement in energy efficiency projects; promotion of rural broadband; and planning for major investments in the green economy.

Local Government Reform Act 2014 provides for a range of changes to the organisation and work of Local Authorities. Among other things, it provides for the merger of a number of Local Authorities; the abolition of town councils; the abolition of city and county development boards; the establishment of Local Community Development Committees, and it provides for a range of changes to the functions carried out by Local Authorities. Section 46 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 came into effect on 1 June 2014, and provided the legislative basis for the Public Participation Networks (PPNs).

NAG means the PPN National Advisory Group.

Not for profit organisations (NGOs) are organisations that work for the good of society, communities and/or a specific interest. They do not make a profit and any income they do make that is above what they need to keep the organisation running is invested back into the organisation. No payments are made to any shareholders. There are many types of not for profit organisations, from very small groups to very large charities.

Plenary: All the Member Groups in a PPN. The Plenary is the ultimate decision-making body of the PPN on operational and local policy issues. The Plenary delegates the administrative and day-to-day functions of the PPN to the PPN Secretariat.

Participative Democracy: See definition of Deliberative Democracy.

PPN Budget means the amount of money a PPN has available to it annually, provided by the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Local Authority, and other sources.

Secretariat means the administrative body of the PPN whose role is to put into practice the decisions of the Plenary; ensure that the PPN runs smoothly in between Plenaries; coordinate the activities of the PPN; communicate regularly with all PPN Member Groups and spread information about all PPN activities as widely as possible; and facilitate and enable the PPN Workers in their day to day activities to deliver PPN objectives.

Social Inclusion: Activity centered on working to improve the life chances and opportunities of those who are on the margins in society, living in poverty and/or in unemployment. Social Inclusion organisations or groups use a community development model to build sustainable communities, where the values of equality and inclusion are promoted and human rights are respected.

SPC (Strategic Policy Committee): Local Authority committees in City and County Councils whose membership includes Elected Councillors, representatives of business, farming interests, environmental/conservation groups, trade unions and community and voluntary members. It is the task of the Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs), as committees of the Council, to advise and assist the Council in the formulation, development and review of policy. They have no role in routine operational matters about the delivery of services. The SPC system is intended to give Councillors and the SPC Representatives an opportunity for full involvement in the policy-making process from the early stages.

Stakeholders means all people, groups, State bodies and local and national Government Departments impacted by or with an interest in the operation and function of the PPN.

Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Thematic Group: A group of PPN groups working on a cross-cutting policy theme, e.g. disability, social inclusion, sustainability.

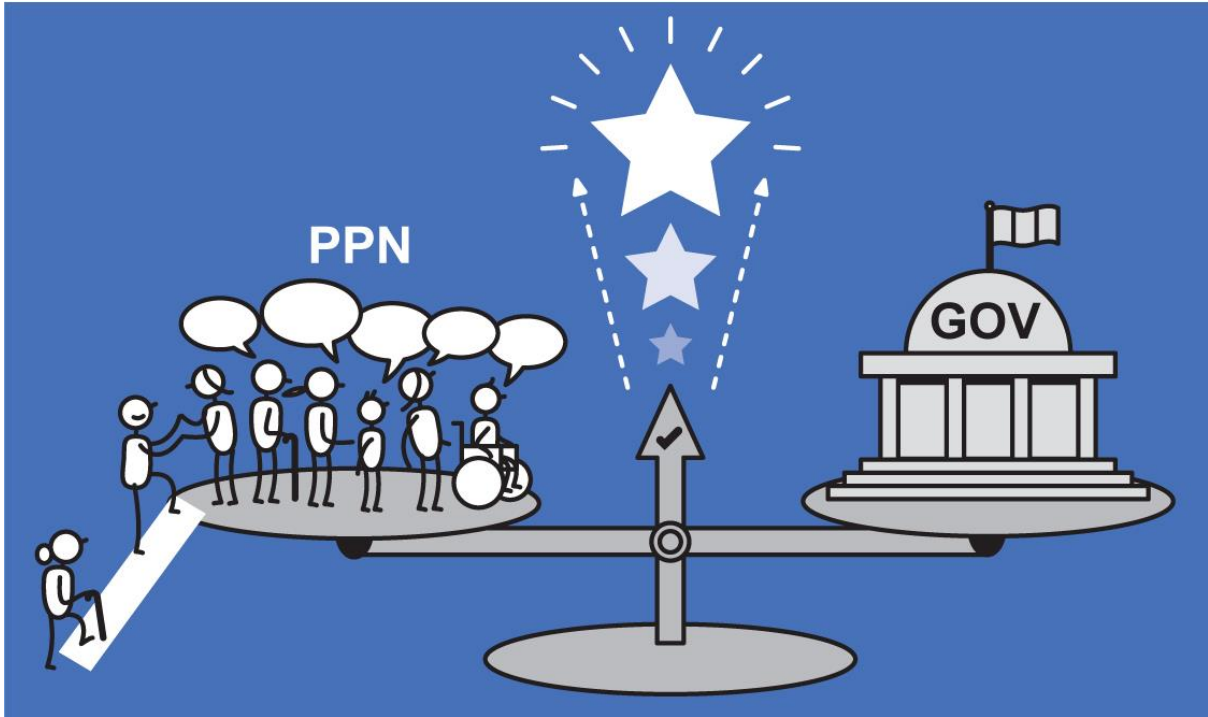
Vision for Community Well-being in the context of the PPN and its Member Groups, describes a community whose basic needs are met, where people have a sense of purpose and feel able to achieve important goals, to participate in society and to live the lives they value and have reason to value. A process for the development of a Vision for Community Wellbeing is available to all PPNs to help them to consult with their Member Groups on what this Vision should contain.

Volunteer-led organisations are groups whose leadership is made up of volunteers acting as a committee, board or other structure. Some volunteer-led organisations may also have paid staff who carry out the day to day tasks on behalf of the leadership.

Working Group on Citizen Engagement was set up in September 2013. Its role was to make recommendations on more extensive and diverse inputs by citizens into the decision-making processes at Local

Government level. The Report of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement was published on 28 February 2014 and its recommendations led to the establishment of the PPNs.

Worker means Resource Worker, Support Worker or other worker engaged by the PPN to carry out its duties.



Section 1: Public Participation and the Public Participation Networks

Why Public Participation?

The need for greater public participation is not a new concept. Alinsky (1946) wrote of the disenchantment with American political structures and the restriction of political participation as being “pretty much restricted to the intermittently recurring elections” (p. 210). Alinsky spoke of the democratic programme as consisting of People’s Organisations, inclusive of both the people and their many organisations. His book set out ‘By-Laws of the People’s Organization’ [sic] with the purpose of uniting all organisations within the community to find “health, happiness and security through a democratic way of life” (p. 221).

Real participation goes beyond voting (representative democracy) to a situation where people and government work in partnership to co-create infrastructure and services, solve problems, and work towards the well-being of all in this generation and the generations to come (deliberative democracy) (Elster, 1998) (Bourke, 2017). This approach demands that power differentials are set aside to make space for views of those who may not traditionally be heard.

Engaging citizens in policy-making is a sound investment and a core element of good governance. It allows governments to tap wider sources of information perspectives and potential solutions, and improves the quality of decisions reached.

OECD, p.11

Detailed country-specific case studies undertaken and published by the OECD in the mid-1990s demonstrated an increasing desire by citizens for greater engagement in political decision-making processes (OECD, 1994). In 2001, the OECD published 'Citizens as Partners: OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-Making' (OECD, 2001) to strengthen Government-Citizen relations and support the recognition of the importance of consultations in decision-making. This Handbook also proposed that countries build a framework for citizen participation, based on the following ten principles.

1. Commitment
2. Rights
3. Clarity
4. Time
5. Objectivity
6. Resources
7. Coordination
8. Accountability
9. Evaluation
10. Active Citizenship

In putting these principles into practice, the Handbook speaks of the benefit to Governments of encouraging Active Citizenship and the need to invest in both civic education and capacity building and the need to foster civil society, including providing regular opportunities for dialogue (p. 88).

The Council of Europe developed its own framework to support citizens' engagement; the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in Decision-making Processes (the Code) (Council of Europe, 2009). This will be discussed in greater detail in Section 3 of this paper.

In an Irish context, the publication of 'Better Local Government – A Programme for Change' in 1996 led to the recognition of local government in the Constitution and widespread local government reform (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 1996). This Report also led to the establishment of Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) to strengthen local decision-making by broadening participation in the decision-making processes and providing a mechanism for input by sectoral interests, including the community and voluntary sector.

The SPCs, and their coordinating structure, the Corporate Policy Group, were established by the Local Government Act, 2001 and

- assist the council in the formulation, development and review of policy;
- reflect the major functions or services of a local authority within the broader context;
- are tailored to the size, membership and administrative resources of a local authority but generally are four in number; and
- have one third of their membership drawn from sectors relevant to the committees' work.

Since 2014, at least one SPC in each Local Authority area must be established in relation to economic development and enterprise in the area (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, 2014c).

Participation...can be defined as an exchange between citizens and government, between those who make policy and people affected by policy choices.

Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2001, p.64

The White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector (the White Paper) laid the foundations for the development of Public Participation Networks by recognising the contribution of the Community and Voluntary sector to the development of “decentralised and participative structures” which contribute to the enhancement of a quality of life for all

(Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2001, p. 10). It further acknowledged the more active role that civil society was coming to play in addressing inequalities and the needs of citizens.

The White Paper set out a vision for a more participatory society. Underlying this vision were five key principles, one of which was 'Helping people to participate in issues that affect them'. While acknowledging that the Government is the ultimate decision-maker, the White Paper aimed to develop the 'participation of the Community and Voluntary sector in partnership and consultation mechanisms' (p. 22). To this end, Government committed relevant Departments and agencies to undertake to hold regular policy fora, on a thematic basis, to allow for wider consultation and participation in the policy-making process.

The commitments set out in the White Paper, while a welcome step towards the development of a more participatory democracy, were framed in the context of the particular circumstances and needs involved as determined by the State and a need to balance community participation against democratically elected governments. This understates the imbalance of power between community groups, State actors and industry lobbyists in shaping policies. Mechanisms for enhancing participation were also discussed within this paper, but stopped short of recommending any dedicated forum for deliberative democracy.

A healthy democracy relies on citizens who are well informed, interested and engaged. It is also linked to a shared sense of empowerment – we can make a difference by voting, joining, speaking, writing or organising.

Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007, p.16

The Taskforce on Active Citizenship, established in 2006 by the Department of the Taoiseach to 'lead a "national conversation" on the extent to which citizens engage in the issues that affect them and their communities...' (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007). Its Report set out a vision for what active citizenship could look like and made a series of recommendations to Government across five thematic areas, including Participation in the Democratic Process; The Public Service and Citizens; Community Engagement and

Promoting a Sense of Community; Education for Citizenship; and Ethnic and Cultural Diversity and the Challenge of Engaging Newcomers, however it is only in the Implementation section of the Report that the Taskforce addresses the 'democratic deficit' at local level due to the absence of meaningful opportunities for participation. Recommendations on civic participation at local level mainly centered on the need to strengthen the Community Fora in operation since 2000, the requirement that public agencies consult with the Fora on areas of community development, and the establishment of local civic participation structures where gaps exist.

At the centre of democracy is the participation of citizens in public life and their right to influence the decisions that affect their lives and communities.

Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, 2012, p.157

The need to develop these structures was further addressed in 'Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government' (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, 2012). This Report recognised the importance of open and inclusive policy-making processes, grounded in openness and transparency. It also acknowledged the "vital role" played by public participation mechanisms in how citizens engage in issues that affect them and their communities and the benefits of this engagement to both local and national governments.

Local Authority Structures for Participation

Local Authorities have a range of formal and informal mechanisms for engaging with individuals and communities on areas of policy which affect them. For the purpose of this research, we will concentrate on the formal structures of committees and boards established by each Local Authority for the purpose of facilitating participation by local stakeholders.

Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) are Local Authority committees whose membership includes elected councillors, representatives of business, farming interests, environmental/conservation groups, trade unions and

community and voluntary members². The purpose of SPCs is to advise and assist the Local Authority on the development of policy areas. As stated previously, since 2014, each Local Authority must establish an SPC to consider economic development and enterprise supports within its community.

The aim of 'Better Local Government' in setting the groundwork for establishing the SPCs was to encourage citizen participation and partnership (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 1996). A review of the Local Government Modernisation Programme (Boyle, Humphreys, O'Donnell, O'Riordan, & Timonen, 2003) found that while the community and voluntary sector had a higher proportion of representatives across the SPCs, there was some uncertainty as to the role of the community representatives and separate training to support these representatives was developed.

Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) are committees which consist of members of the Local Authority, Local Authority staff, representatives of public bodies who provide funding to the area, people from the local community interests, people from the local community, and people from publicly funded / supported local development groups³. They were developed on foot of the Putting People First Action Plan (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, 2012) to coordinate, plan and oversee local and community development funding, bring a coherent approach to the operation of community development programmes, promote meaningful citizen engagement in the planning and development of community programmes, and develop an integrated approach across providers and sectors.

A review of the LCDCs conducted in 2019 found many areas of good practice across the LCDCs, but emphasised the need for stronger and more consistent communication (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2019). Of particular interest in the context of this report, is the "prevailing view...that community interests are not

² <https://www.housing.gov.ie/local-government/administration/policy/local-government-policy>

³ <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/f4022e-local-community-development-committees-lcdcs/>

adequately considered or represented at LCDC level...” (p. 38).

Joint Policing Committees (JPCs) were established by the Department of Justice and Equality to provide a dedicated forum to support consultation, cooperation and synergy on policing and crime issues between An Garda Síochána, local authority officials, elected representatives and PPN community representatives⁴. A review of the JPCs was conducted in 2012 and, following the reform of Local Government structures in 2014, the guidelines were revised to place more of an emphasis on the need to collaborate with all stakeholders (Department of Justice and Equality, 2014).

The Development of the Public Participation Networks

In 2014, the Working Group on Citizen Engagement (the Working Group) published its report which recommended the establishment of the Public Participation Networks in each of the 31 Local Authority areas (Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government, 2014). This was achieved through the Local Government Reform Act, 2014 which put Public Participation Networks (PPNs) on a statutory footing⁵.

In giving effect to this legislation, the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government chose four pilot areas for the establishment of the first PPNs – Laois, Tipperary, Galway County and South Dublin – to “enable the public to take an active formal role in relevant policy making and oversight committees of the Local Authority” (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, 2014a). This was then quickly followed by the roll-out of the PPN structure across all Local Authority areas (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, 2014b).

Since early 2014, the PPNs have evolved, from the initial Introduction Period, through the Development Period to the Consolidation Period (Bourke, 2017) and are now firmly established and recognised as the main conduit by which Local Authorities engage with their communities, with a membership of more than 15,000 organisations from the Community and Voluntary, Social Inclusion and Environmental sectors (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2019). In particular, certain Local Authority structures, such as the Strategic Policy Committees and Local Community

⁴ http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Joint_Policing_Committees

⁵ Section 46

Development Committees, must source community representation through the PPNs.

Acknowledging that the PPNs are in their “relative infancy”, a case study of the PPNs conducted by the Centre for Effective Services on behalf of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform acknowledged the achievement by the PPNs of a “huge level of engagement within the local government structure” (Centre for Effective Services, 2020). The case study noted the expanding and inclusive membership of the PPNs, their status as an established communications channel between local government and their member groups, and a source of “high quality citizen engagement” as positive aspects of the PPN engagement. While noting that there are lessons to be learned from the exercise, the recommendations following the conclusion of the case study centered more on change management, investing in relations and matching resources with the emerging needs of the PPN stakeholders, than improvements to the civic participation mechanisms employed by the PPN and Local Authorities. It must be noted in this regard that the aim of the case study was not to provide a comprehensive review of the efficacy or operations of the PPNs, but to review a certain aspect of community engagement.

The PPN structure is underpinned by a set of Principles and Values, modeled on those put forward by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2009), and set out in the PPN User Guide (Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 2017):

Inclusive of all volunteer-led organisations in their area, and actively seeking the inclusion of groups which may traditionally be marginalised.

Participatory, open, welcoming, respectful, collaborative and facilitory; the PPN will encourage participation by members in all aspects of its operation. It is a flat structure. Clear communications to and from members using a variety of traditional and new mechanisms are essential to achieve this. The PPN should support new or inexperienced members to develop their skills and capacity.

Independent from the Local Authority and of any vested interests. Open, flat and participatory working structures support this.

Valuing of Diversity and recognising that the sectors are broad and made up of people with many different opinions.

It is not expected that the PPNs will come up with a ‘one voice response’ but that it will feed back the issues and suggestions raised by a broad range of environmental, social inclusion, community and voluntary groups.

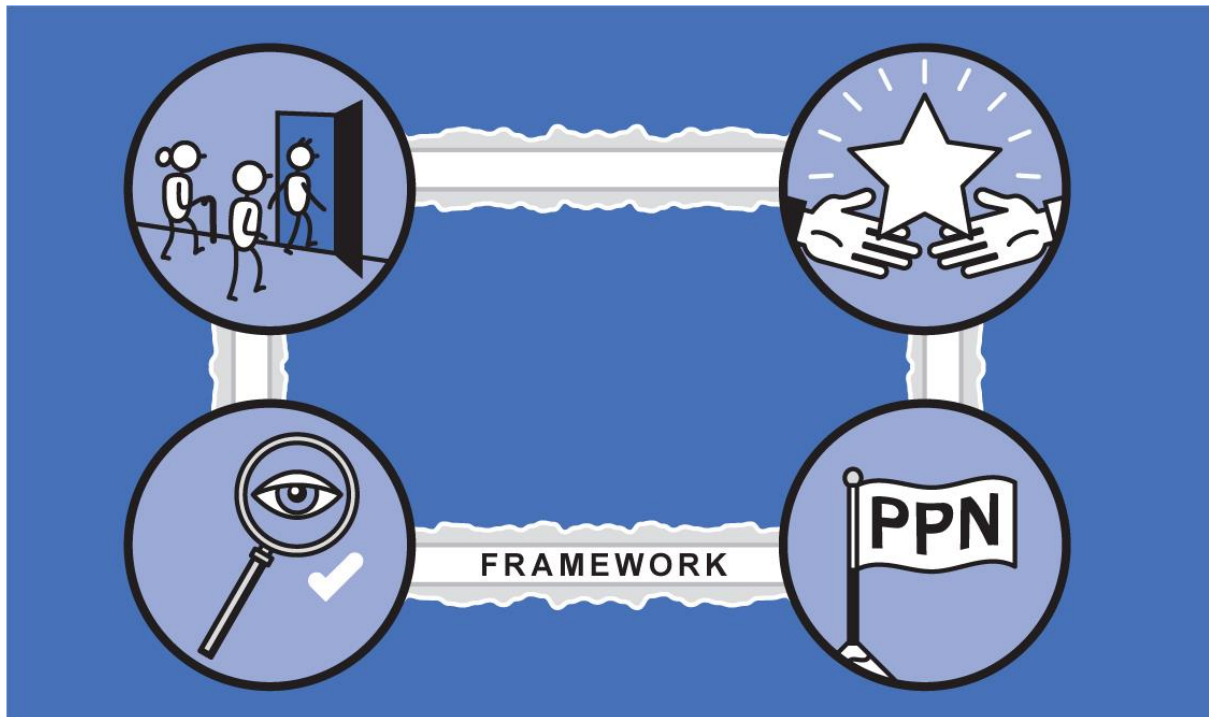
Transparent in its processes, procedures, and dealings with its member groups, representatives, Local Authority etc. It should communicate openly, regularly and clearly with all members.

Accountable to its member groups, via implementing and abiding by good governance structures, policies and procedures.

The main way in which PPNs facilitate participation in local democracy is through the nomination and election of representatives on to Local Authority Committees and Boards. These representatives are nominated either by the full membership of the PPN (the Plenary); by a Linkage Group or Thematic Network established for the purpose of nominating and supporting PPN Representatives on a particular Committee or theme; or by one of the three PPN Colleges – the Community and Voluntary College; the Social Inclusion College; or the Environmental College⁶. In agreeing to be nominated, PPN Representatives undertake to uphold the Principles and Values of the PPN and to represent the PPN, rather than his or her own views or member group.

The framework for participation recommended by the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government was that developed by the Council of Europe, which follows a progression from least participatory to most participatory (Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government, 2014). This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

⁶ On joining a PPN, member groups are asked to select which College most reflects their purpose and interest.



Section 2: Framework for Participation in Political Decision-making: The Council of Europe Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in Decision-making Processes

To address what it called “one of the major concerns of modern democracies”, that is the alienation of citizens from the decision-making process, the Council of Europe devised a Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in Decision-making Processes (the Code) (Council of Europe, 2009). The stated principal objective of this Code was to support NGOs in Council of Europe states and Belarus by defining a set of principles, guidelines and other tools to support participation in the decision-making process (p. 4).

In considering the parameters of civil society, the Code recognises the dual-role that NGOs play in a democratic society, creating a mechanism for social change through engaging large numbers of individuals, while acknowledging that those individuals may also be voters. Given the role that NGOs have in advocating for change, and the experience and expertise garnered through their work, the Code concentrates on the role of ‘organised civil society’ in democratic processes, rather than participation by individuals. In establishing these parameters, the Code sets out four principles to ‘foster a

constructive relationship' between civil society and decision-makers. These principles are (pp. 5-6):

Participation

NGOs collect and channel views of their members, user groups and concerned citizens. This input provides crucial value to the political decision-making process, enhancing the quality, understanding and longer-term applicability of the policy initiative. A pre-condition for this principle is that the processes for participation are open and accessible, based on agreed parameters for participation.

Trust

An open and democratic society is based on honest interaction between actors and sectors. Although NGOs and public authorities have different roles to play, the shared goal of improving the lives of people can only be satisfactorily reached if based on trust, implying transparency, respect and mutual reliability.

Accountability and transparency

Acting in the public interest requires openness, responsibility, clarity and accountability from both the NGOs and public authorities, with transparency at all stages.

Independence

NGOs must be recognised as free and independent bodies in respect to their aims, decisions and activities. They have the right to act independently and advocate positions different from the authorities with whom they may otherwise cooperate.

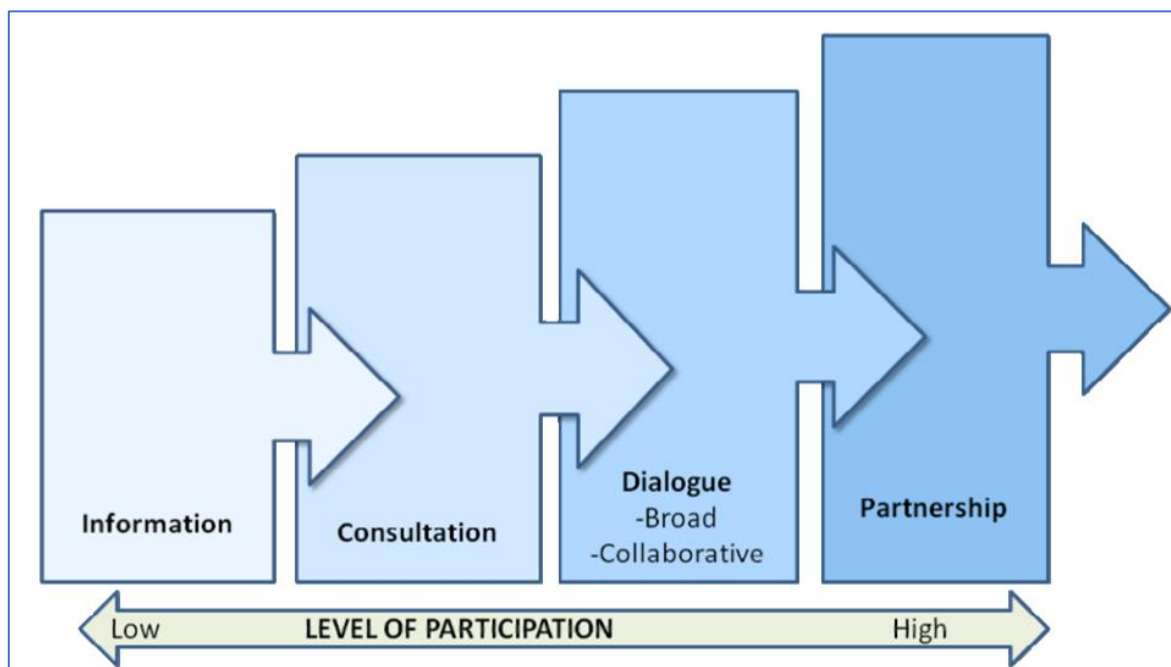
In its Report, the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government proposed that these principles be 'at the core of all governance participation processes' (Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government, 2014, p. 18). These principles were then incorporated in the Principles and Values for the PPNs and set out in the PPN User Guide (Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 2017).

The Code provides a framework for how these principles may be put into practice. It outlines what the Council of Europe describes as 'two interconnected dimensions' – the first dimension concerns the level of participation, while the second sets out the steps in the decision-making process.

Levels of Participation

The Council of Europe identifies four levels of participation, from least to most participative – Information, Consultation, Dialogue, and Partnership (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Levels of Participation



Source: Council of Europe, *Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in Decision-making processes*, p.7

Each of these levels is defined as follows (p. 8):

Information

Access to information is the basis for all subsequent steps in the involvement of NGOs in the political decision-making process. This is a relatively low level of participation which usually consists of a one-way provision of information from the public authorities and no interaction or involvement with NGOs is required or expected.

Information is relevant for all steps in the decision-making process.

Consultation

This is a form of initiative where the public authorities ask NGOs for their opinion on a specific policy topic or development. Consultation usually includes the authorities

informing NGOs of current policy developments and asking for comments, views and feed-back. The initiative and themes originate with the public authorities, not with the NGOs.

Consultation is relevant for all steps of the decision-making process, especially for drafting, monitoring and reformulation.

Dialogue

The initiative for dialogue can be taken by either party and can be either broad or collaborative.

A broad dialogue is a two-way communication built on mutual interests and potentially shared objectives to ensure a regular exchange of views. It ranges from open public hearings to specialised meetings between NGOs and public authorities. The discussion remains wide-ranging and is not explicitly linked to a current policy development process.

A collaborative dialogue is built on mutual interests for a specific policy development. The collaborative dialogue usually leads to a joint recommendation, strategy or legislation.

Collaborative dialogue is more empowered than the broad dialogue as it consists of joint, often frequent and regular, meetings to develop core policy strategies and often leads to agreed outcomes.

Dialogue is highly valued at all steps in the political decision-making cycle, but is crucial for agenda-setting, drafting and reformulation.

Partnership

A partnership implies shared responsibilities in each step of the political decision-making process from agenda-setting, drafting, decision and implementation of policy initiatives. It is the highest form of participation.

At this level NGOs and the public authorities come together for a close cooperation while ensuring that the NGOs continue to be independent and have the right to campaign and act irrespective of a partnership situation. Partnership can include activities such as delegation of a specific task to an NGO, for example delivery of services, as well as

participatory forums and the establishment of co-decision-making bodies, including for resource allocation.

Partnership may take place at all steps of the political decision-making process and is particularly relevant at the agenda-setting or implementation steps.

The steps in the decision-making process are then set out as a cycle from Agenda-Setting, through Drafting, Decision, Implementation, Monitoring, and Reformulation (Figure 2). These steps are defined by the Council of Europe in the Code as follows (pp. 7-15):

Agenda-setting

The political agenda is agreed by the parliament and government but can be shaped by NGOs, or groups of NGOs, through campaigns and lobbying for issues, needs and concerns. New policy initiatives are often the result of influence of the campaigns of NGOs. During this step NGOs aim to influence decision-makers on behalf of a collective interest and act in a way that is complementary to political debate.

Drafting

Public authorities usually have well-established processes for policy drafting. Here NGOs are often involved in areas such as identifying problems, proposing solutions and providing evidence for their preferred proposal with, for example, interviews or research. Facilitating opportunities for consultation should be a key element in this step, as should various forms of dialogue to collect input from key stakeholders.

Decision

The forms of political decision-making vary based on national context and legislation. Common characteristics are the establishment of a government policy directive by a ministry; or legislation, such as passing a law by parliamentary vote; or public referendum, which then requires enabling legislation. Draft laws and motions should be open to input and participation of NGOs. The public authorities should evaluate different views and opinions before the decision is taken. At this step consultation is central to informed decision. However the final power of choice lies with the public

authorities, unless the decision is taken by a public vote, referendum or a co-decision mechanism.

Implementation

This is the step at which many NGOs are most active, for example in service delivery and project execution. Much of the work done by NGOs in the previous steps includes attempts to influence the implementation of policy. This phase is especially important to ensure that the intended outcome will be fulfilled. Access to clear and transparent information on expectations and opportunities is important at this step, as well as active partnerships.

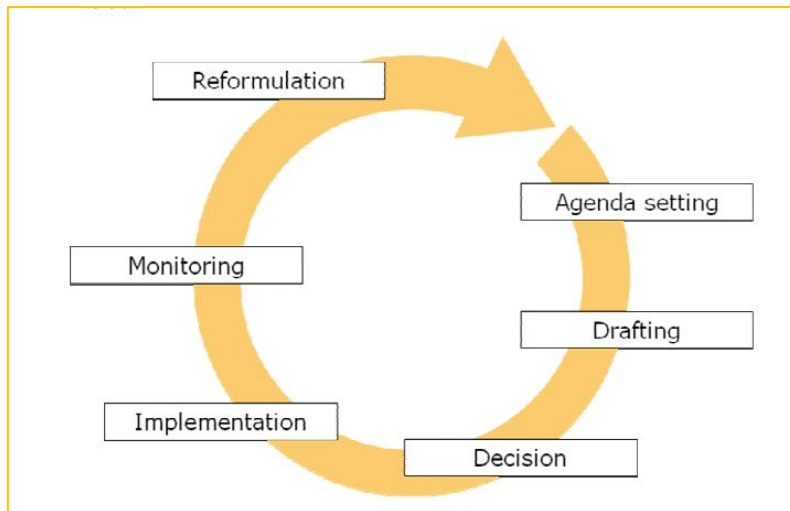
Monitoring

At this point the role of NGOs is to monitor and assess the outcomes of the implemented policy. It is important to have in place an effective and transparent monitoring system that ensures the policy/programme achieves the intended purpose.

Reformulation

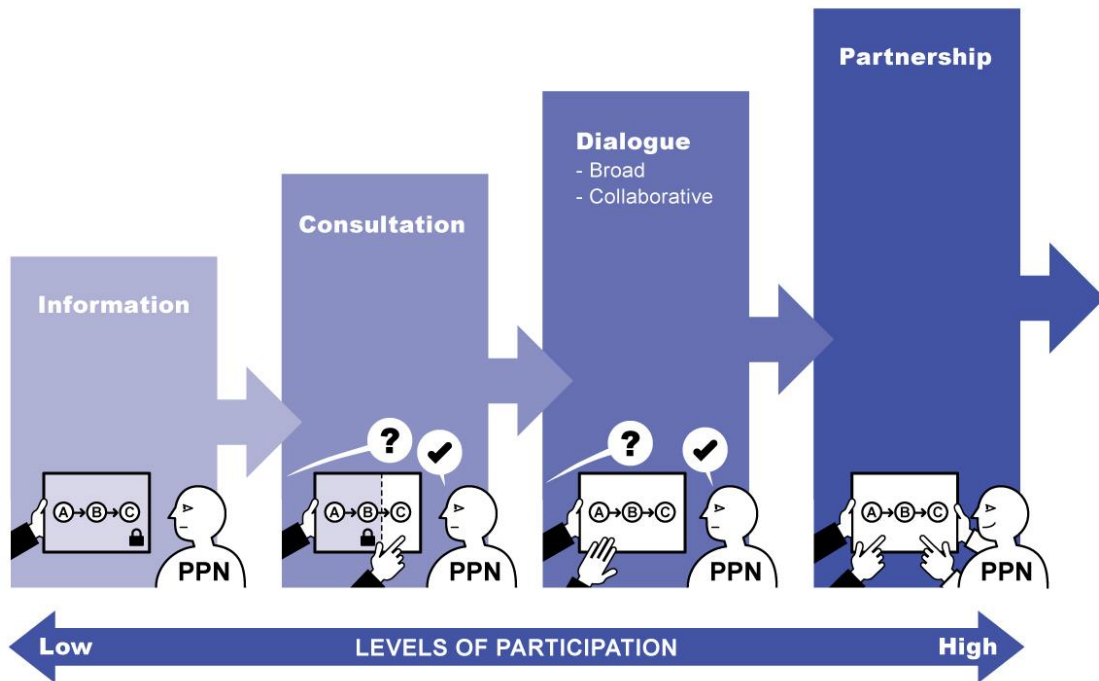
The knowledge gained from assessing the policy implementation, coupled with evolving needs in society, often require a reformulation of policy. This must be based on access to information and opportunities for dialogue to identify needs and initiatives. This reformulation allows for the initiation of a new cycle of decision-making.

Figure 2: Steps in the political decision-making process



Source: Council of Europe, *Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in Decision-making processes*, p.9

The Council of Europe acknowledges that each step of the decision-making process may involve a greater or lesser degree of participation. In conducting this research, we were concerned to capture how the PPN stakeholders felt the principles as set out by the Council of Europe, and to a large part adopted by the Government of Ireland for the PPNs, applied to their engagement in the decision-making processes. We also wanted to capture their views on how the two interconnected dimensions of the level of engagement in each part of the decision-making process applied in this context.



Section 3: Applying the Framework to the PPNs

The purpose of this research was to capture how the various PPN stakeholders engaged in the participation processes ‘on the ground’ viewed the application of the principles set out in the Council of Europe Framework to participation by the PPN, both overall and at each stage of the decision-making process. This data can then be used to inform policy on participation in local decision-making to support more active engagement.

A survey, based on the scale of participation set out in the Council of Europe’s Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process and the Council of Europe Guidelines for Civil Participation in Political Decision-making, was developed and reviewed by a member of the *Social Justice Ireland Academic Advisory Council* and an external researcher. This was then uploaded to the online survey platform SurveyMonkey and circulated to all PPN Workers with a request that they circulate it to their respective PPN Secretariat Members, PPN Representatives and relevant Local Authority staff. A link to the survey was also provided to a member of the City and County Managers Association (CCMA) for circulation to relevant Local Authority staff. As the aim of the survey was to capture the ‘on the ground’ experience of PPN Workers, Representatives and Local Authority staff who engage with Committees and Boards at

Local Authority level, other important stakeholders, such as the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, were not invited to participate.

The survey was active from 15th June 2020 until 31st August 2020 (an extension to the original timeframe of 31st July 2020 was provided due to interest in engagement). A copy of the survey questionnaire is appended at Appendix 1.

The survey data was then filtered to include complete responses only. The respondent ID numbers were checked to ensure there were no duplicates.

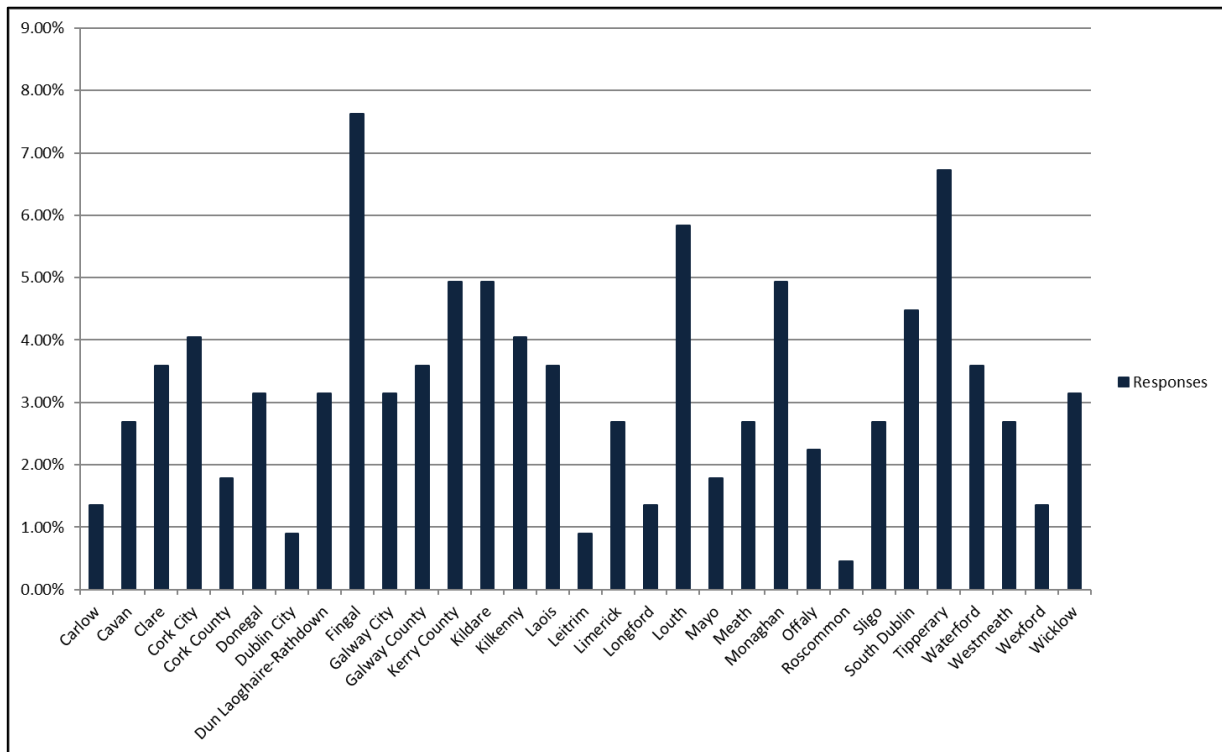
The Respondents

A total of 223 complete and unique responses was received, representing at least one response from each of the 31 PPN / Local Authority areas. The breakdown of respondents per Local Authority is set out in Table 1 and Chart 1.

Table 1: Respondents by Local Authority Area, Number

PPN	No.	PPN	No.
Carlow	3	Limerick	6
Cavan	6	Longford	3
Clare	8	Louth	13
Cork City	9	Mayo	4
Cork County	4	Meath	6
Donegal	7	Monaghan	11
Dublin City	2	Offaly	5
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown	7	Roscommon	1
Fingal	17	Sligo	6
Galway City	7	South Dublin	10
Galway County	8	Tipperary	15
Kerry	11	Waterford	8
Kildare	11	Westmeath	6
Kilkenny	9	Wexford	3
Laois	8	Wicklow	7
Leitrim	2	Total	223

Chart 1: Respondents by Local Authority Area, %



Notes: n=223

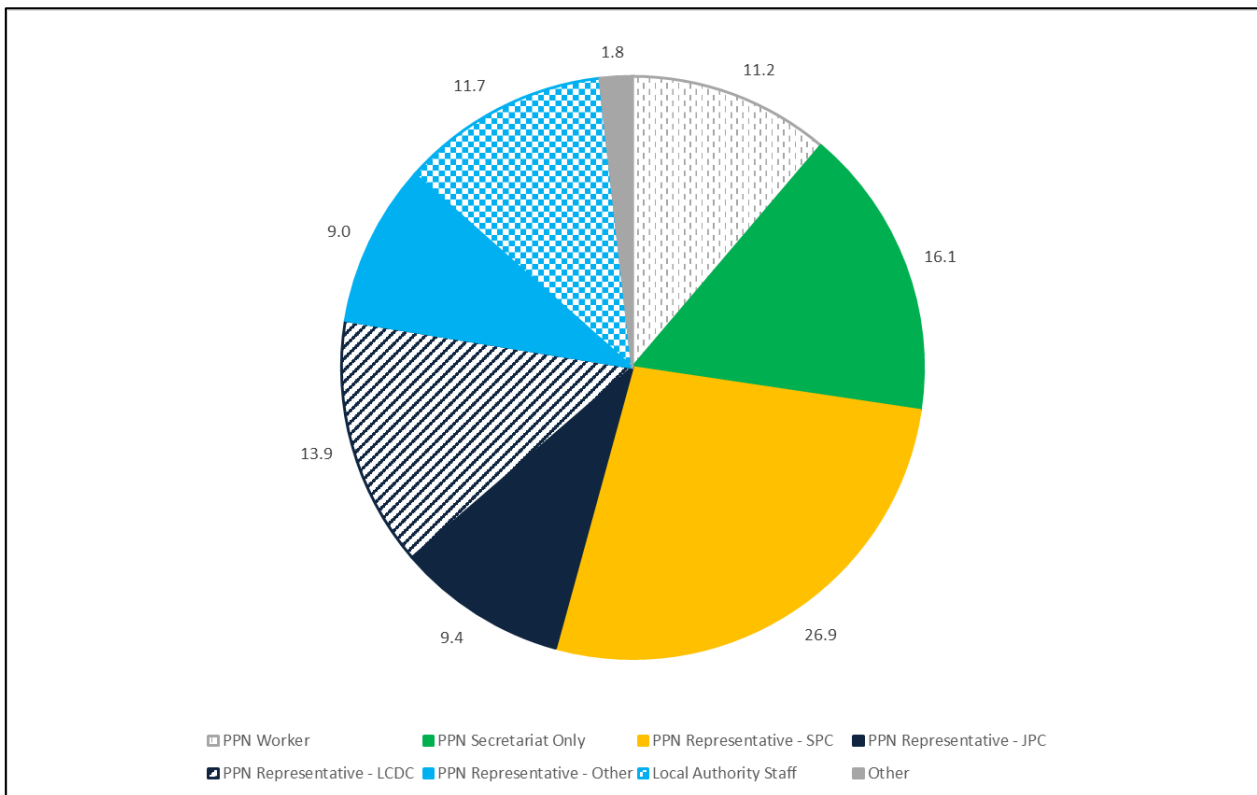
Respondents were asked to identify the stakeholder group to which they belonged. A breakdown of respondents by stakeholder group is set out in Table 2 and Chart 2.

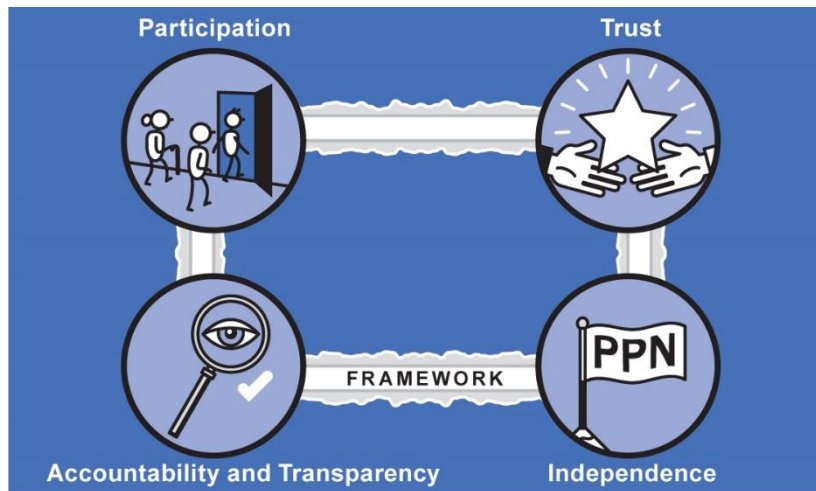
PPN Workers may include Resource Workers and/or Support Workers; PPN Secretariat Only refers to a respondent who is a representative of a PPN Member Group on the PPN Secretariat, but does not represent the PPN on any other policy forum; PPN Representatives on Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs), Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and Joint Policing Committees (JPCs) are those representing the PPN on the statutory policy committees discussed earlier in this paper; PPN Representatives “Other” are those who represent their PPN on the wide range of other Committees and Boards, such as Tourism Boards, Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Forces, or Steering Committees on local issues and action groups; Local Authority Staff are those respondents who work within the Local Authority and engage with the PPN; and the four “Other” respondents consist of members of PPN Member Groups and an Elected Official.

Table 2: Respondents by Stakeholder Group, Number

Stakeholder Group	No.
PPN Worker	25
PPN Secretariat Only	36
PPN Representative – SPC	60
PPN Representative – JPC	21
PPN Representative – LCDC	31
PPN Representative – Other	20
Local Authority Staff	26
Other	4
Total	223

Chart 2: Respondents by Stakeholder Group, %





Principles of Participation

An important aspect of the Council of Europe’s Framework (Council of Europe, 2009) is the application of the principles underpinning it which help foster a “constructive relationship” (p. 5). In developing our survey of PPNs, we asked respondents to consider these principles in the following terms as applicable to the PPNs. All stakeholders would be familiar with the Principles and Values that underpin the PPN, however this question asked respondents to look at how the following principles applied to the decision-making relationship.

Participation

PPNs collect and channel the views of their membership. The input is critical to the policy-making process. Participation processes are open and accessible.

Trust

Honest interaction between PPN and Local Authority. Shared goals can only be reached if based on trust. Transparency, respect and mutual reliability are key tenets.

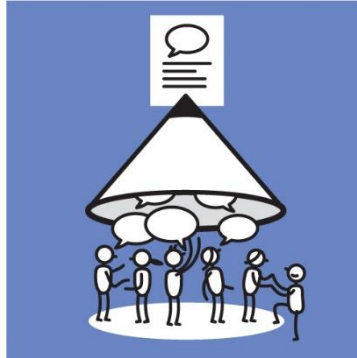
Accountability and Transparency

Acting in the public interest requires openness, responsibility, clarity and accountability.

Independence

PPNs are free and independent in respect of their aims, decisions and activities. They have the right to act independently and advocate different positions to those of the Local Authority.

We then asked each respondent to consider a value statement and rate the statement on a scale from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”. This provided an insight into how respondents felt the principles established by the Council of Europe in its Code were being applied in a PPN context.

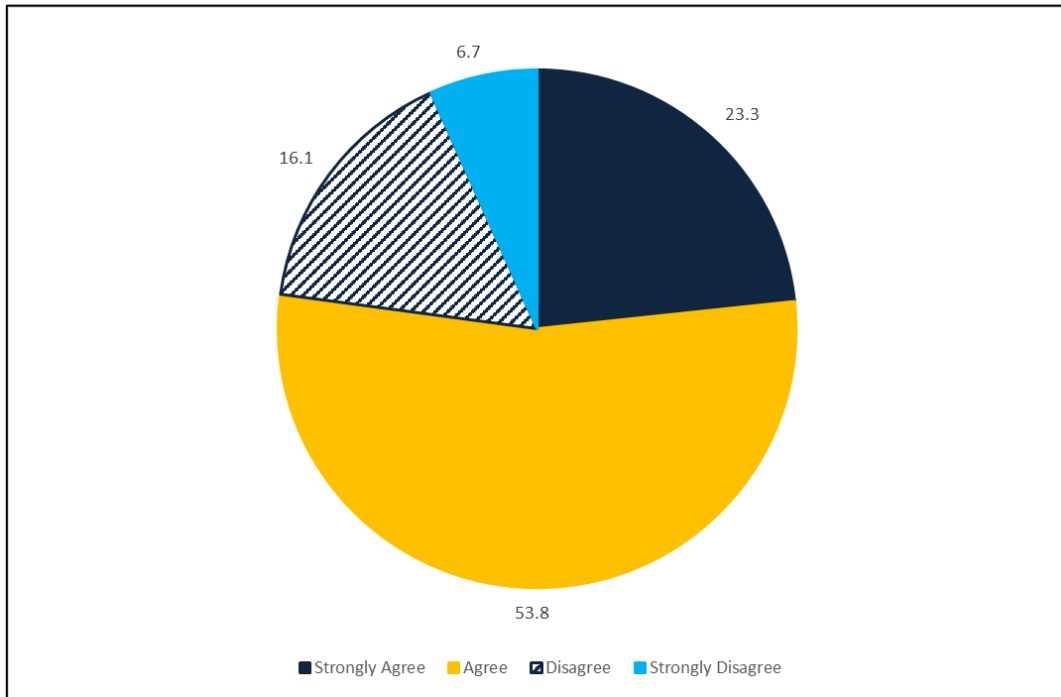


Statement 1: The Local Authority actively encourages participation by the PPN

This question sought the opinion of respondents in respect of how participation, as defined above, is encouraged by the Local Authority as a principle of engagement between the Local Authority and the PPN. As can be seen from Chart 3, the majority of respondents (77.1 per cent) either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, with the remaining 22.8 per cent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing⁷.

⁷ Calculation equates to less than 100 per cent due to rounding.

Chart 3: Participation - Response by Proportion (%) of Stakeholder Group, Total



This presents a positive picture of how participation is valued as a principle by Local Authorities.

When we break these data down into component stakeholder groups⁸ (Table 3 and Chart 4), we see the proportion of Local Authority Staff that Strongly Agreed with this statement was higher than any other stakeholder group, while the ‘PPN Representatives – Other’ were proportionately more likely to disagree with this statement.

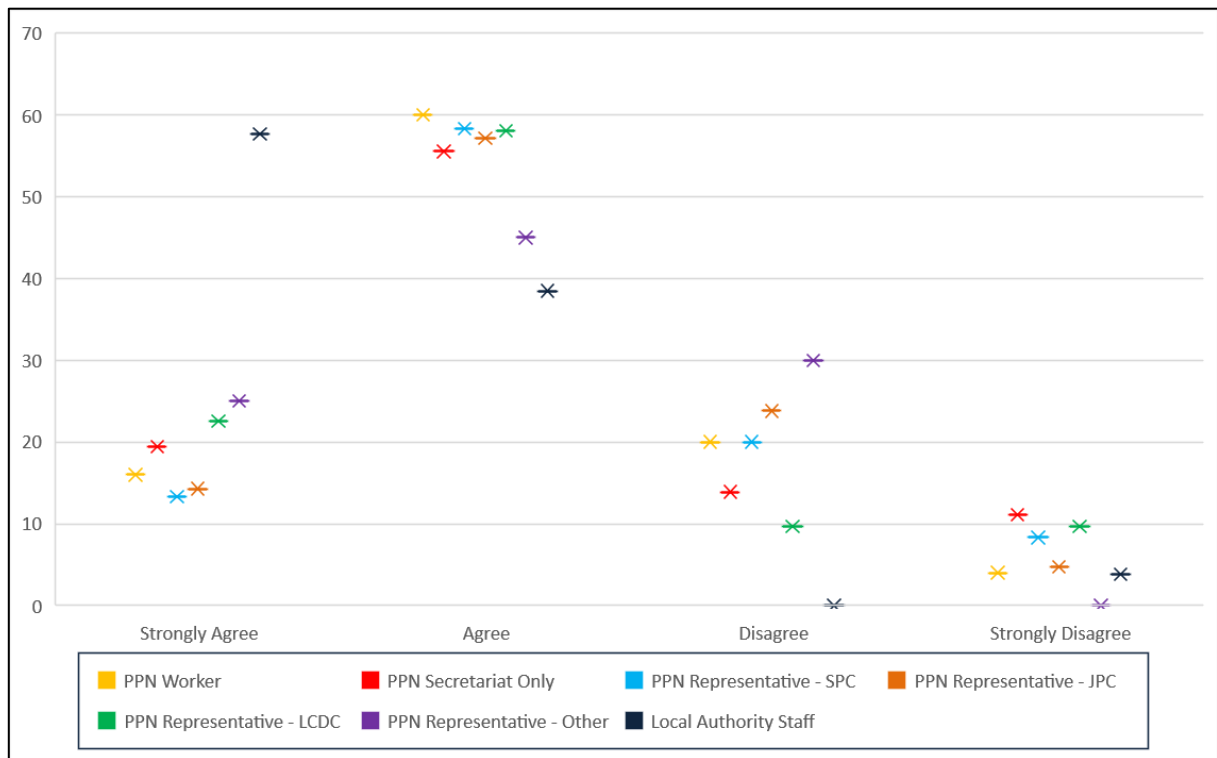
Table 3: Participation - Response by Stakeholder Group, Number

Stakeholder Group	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
PPN Worker	4	15	5	1
PPN Secretariat Only	7	20	5	4
PPN Representative – SPC	8	35	12	5
PPN Representative – JPC	3	12	5	1

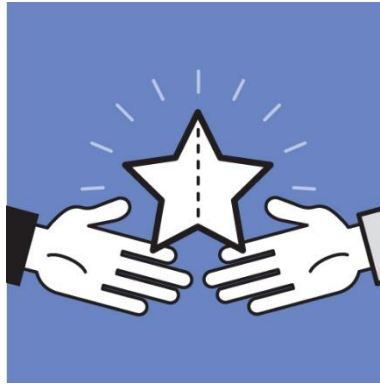
⁸ With the exception of “Other” as the low sample presents a statistical anomaly when analysed in this way.

PPN Representative – LCDC	7	18	3	3
PPN Representative – Other	5	9	6	0
Local Authority Staff	15	10	0	1
Other	3	1	0	0
Total	52	120	36	15

Chart 4: Participation - Response by Proportion (%) of Stakeholder Group*



*Note: with the exception of "Other"



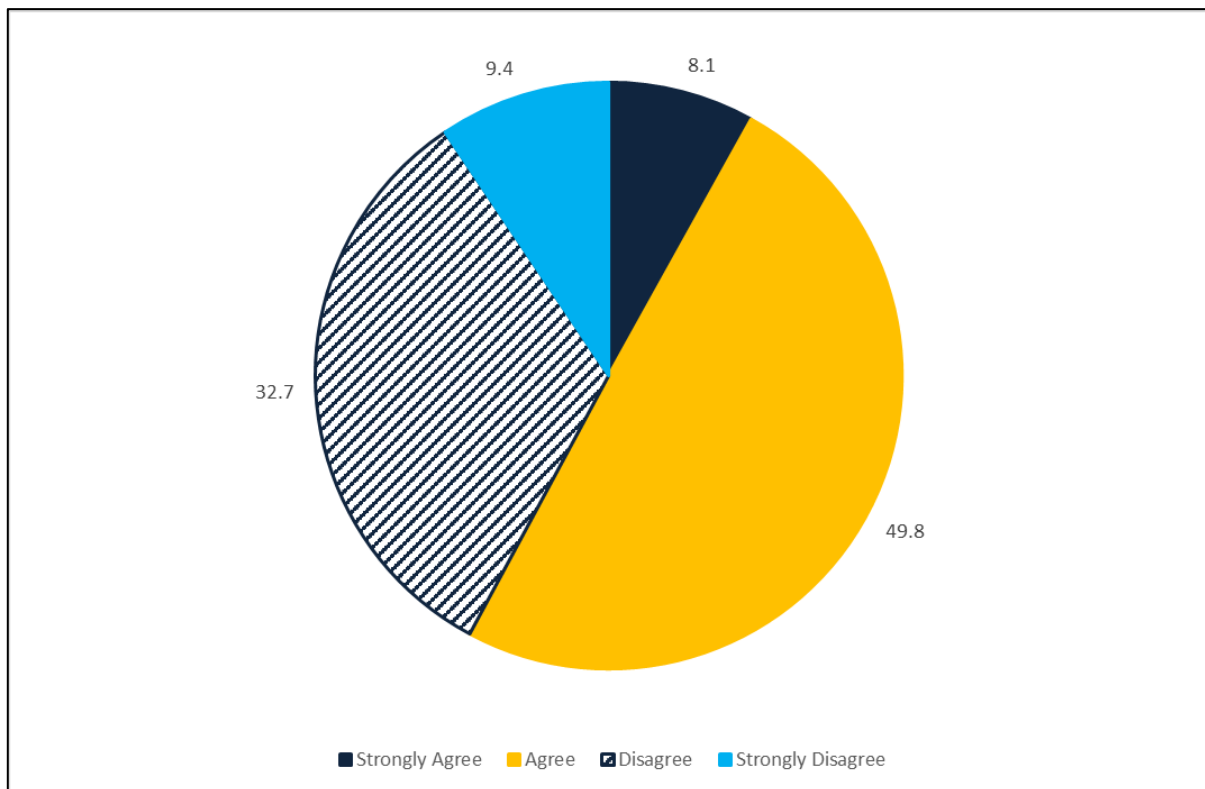
Statement 2: The decision-making processes in the Local Authority are open and accessible

The principles of trust, accountability and transparency are so interrelated that the responses to Statements 2, 3 and 4 could be read together. For the purpose of Statement 2, we sought to measure how open and accessible the respondents felt the decision-making process was as a whole. Statement 3, the responses to which will be analysed later in this paper, seeks to gauge the respondents' view on the level of transparency in their dealings with each other, and Statement 4 then asked about accountability between the Local Authority and the PPN.

As can be clearly seen in Chart 5, while over half of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement (57.9 per cent), more than two in five respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The difference between the proportion of respondents who disagreed with this statement compared to Statement 1 above (42.1 per cent compared to 22.8 per cent disagreement with Statement 1) indicates that while respondents feel that participation is encouraged by the Local Authority, this may not extend to the ability to participate in local decision-making processes. This is an area we will look at in greater detail later in this paper.

Chart 5: Trust - Response by Proportion (%) of Stakeholder Group, Total



When we break the respondents down into stakeholder groups⁹, we see that a higher proportion of Local Authority staff Strongly Agreed or Agreed with this statement than any other stakeholder group, while a higher proportion of ‘PPN Representatives – Other’ and ‘PPN Representatives – JPC’ disagreed. ‘PPN Representatives – SPC’ were proportionately more likely to Strongly Disagree with this statement, with one in five of those selecting this response (Table 4 and Chart 6).

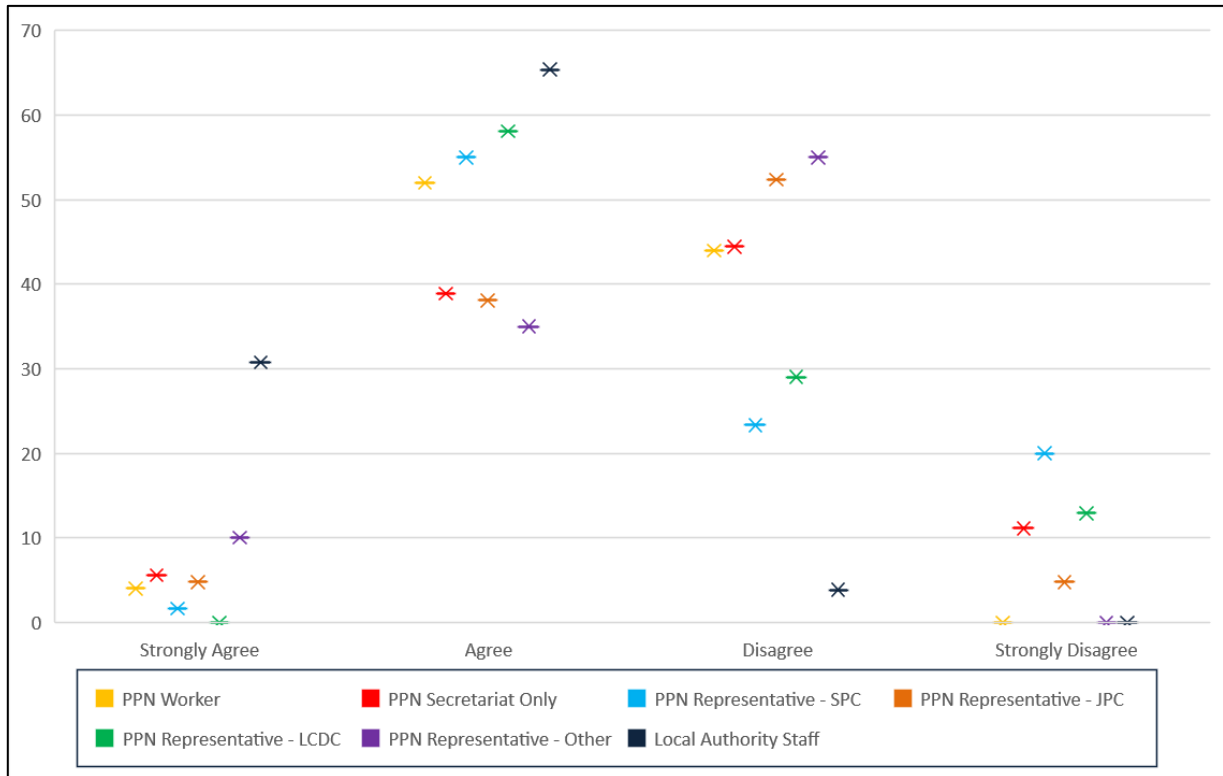
Table 4: Trust - Response by Stakeholder Group, Number

Stakeholder Group	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
PPN Worker	1	13	11	0
PPN Secretariat Only	2	14	16	4
PPN Representative – SPC	1	33	14	12
PPN Representative – JPC	1	8	11	1

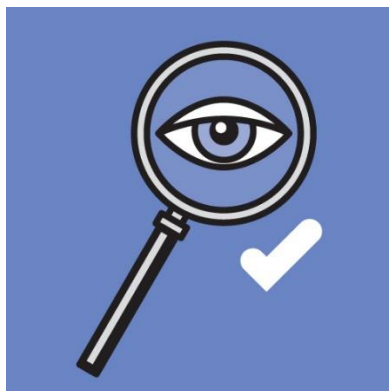
⁹ See footnote 7

PPN Representative – LCDC	0	18	9	4
PPN Representative – Other	2	7	11	0
Local Authority Staff	8	17	1	0
Other	3	1	0	0
Total	18	111	73	21

Chart 6: Trust - Response by Proportion (%) of Stakeholder Group*



Note: With the exception of "Other"



Statement 3: The relationship between the Local Authority and the PPN is based on transparency, respect and mutual reliability

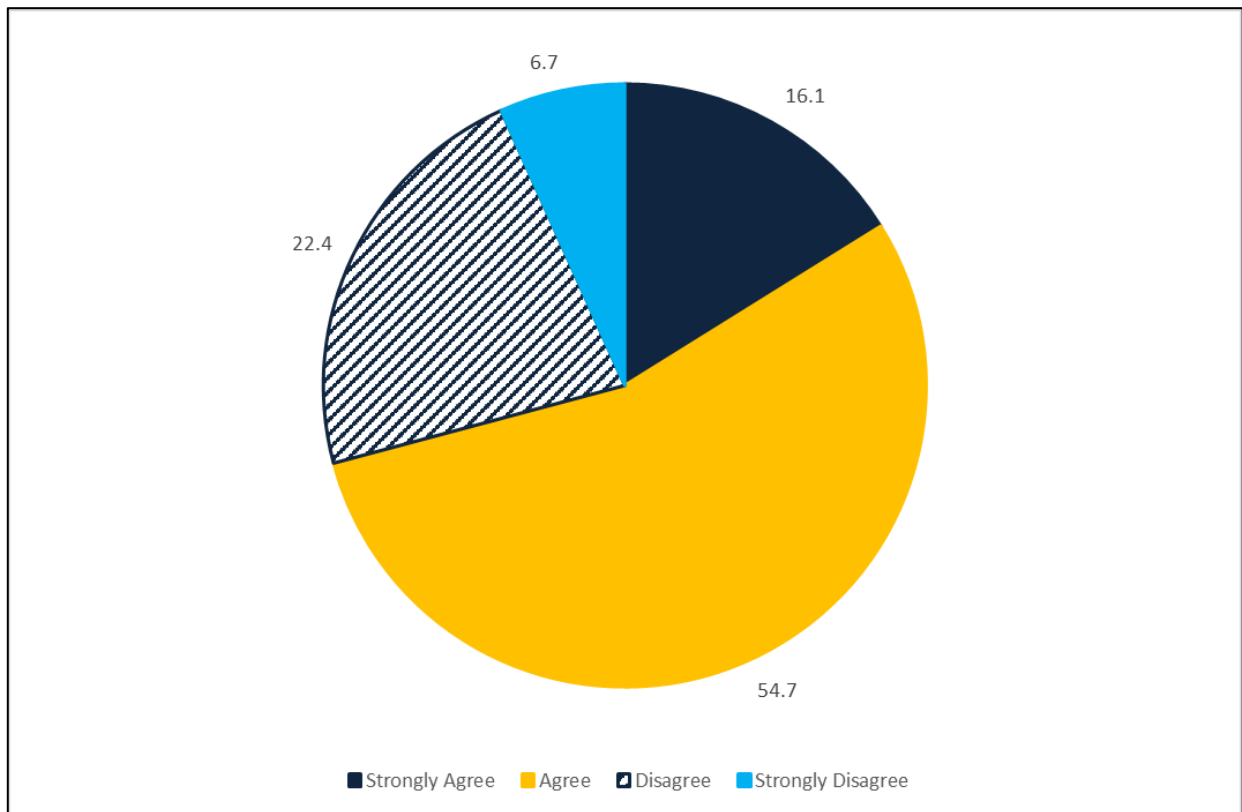
We then sought to gauge how respondents felt the principle of accountability and transparency applied to the relationship between the Local Authority and the PPN, focusing on the aspect of transparency. Transparency is seen as a key aspect of any democracy (Brin, 1998) (Oliver, 2004) and should lead to greater trust in institutions¹⁰.

This statement seeks to gauge the views of respondents as to how transparent the PPN and the Local Authority are in their dealings with each other overall, as opposed to confined to the decision-making context. It is interesting that the proportion of respondents who strongly agreed with this statement was almost twice that of Statement 2 (16.1 per cent compared to 8.1 per cent). The proportion of respondents who agreed was almost five percentage points higher (54.7 per cent compared to 49.8 per cent) (Chart 7).

This indicates that while the *relationship* between the PPN and the Local Authority is viewed as transparent, this does not extend to the *decision-making processes*, an area we will return to later in this paper.

¹⁰ Although this is not always the case, see Grimmelikhuijsen, S.G. (2010): *Transparency of Public Decision-Making: Towards Trust in Local Government?*, Policy Studies Organisation. Berkley Electronic Press: California.

Chart 7: Transparency - Response by Proportion (%) of Stakeholder Group, Total



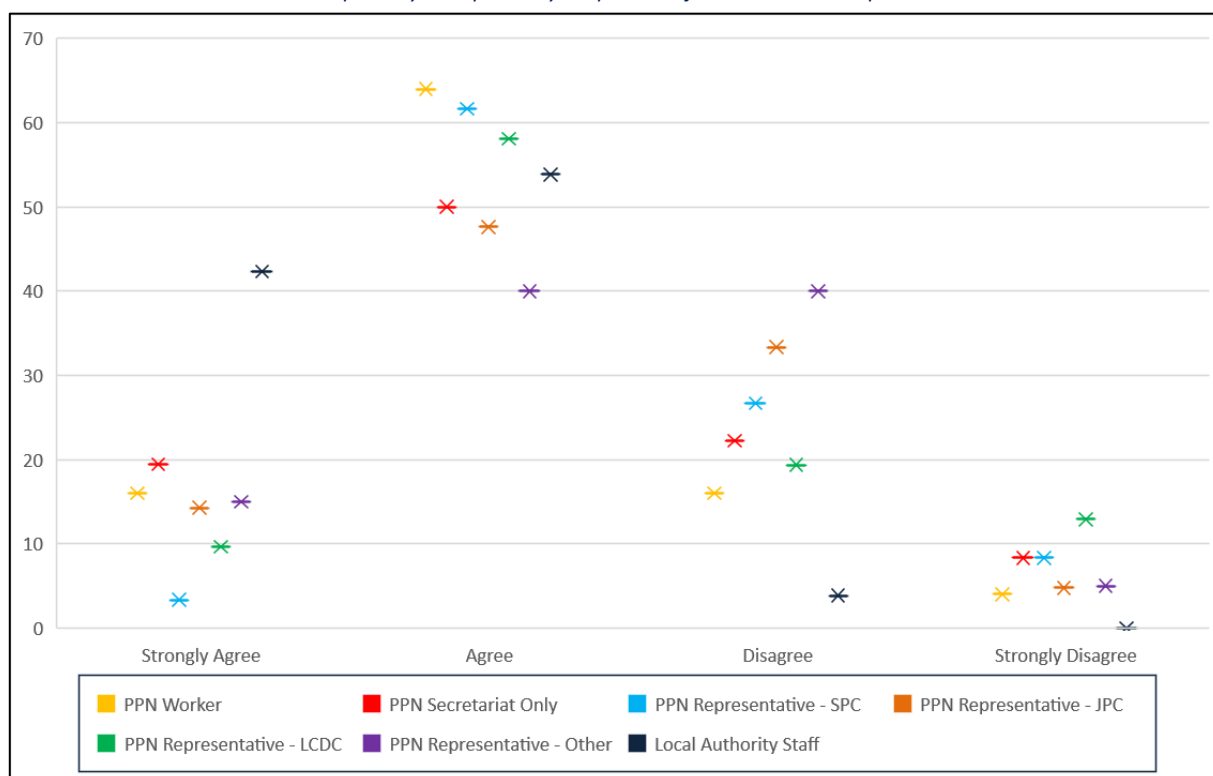
Again looking at the proportional breakdown across all stakeholder groups (Table 5 and Chart 8), a higher proportion of Local Authority Staff strongly agreed with this statement at 42.3 per cent – more than double the next-highest stakeholder group (PPN Representative – SPC at 19.4 per cent). Almost two-thirds of the ‘PPN Representative – SPC’ respondents did, however, agree with the statement (61.7 per cent), as did 58.1 per cent of the ‘PPN Representative – LCDC’ respondents.

The respondents with the highest proportion who disagree with the statement are ‘PPN Representative – JPC’ (at 33.3 per cent), followed by ‘PPN Representative – SPC’ (26.7 per cent) and ‘PPN – Secretariat Only’ (22.2 per cent). This suggests some disparity across Strategic Policy Committees as to the level of trust between stakeholders.

Table 5: Transparency - Responses by Stakeholder Group, Number

Stakeholder Group	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
PPN Worker	4	16	4	1
PPN Secretariat Only	7	18	8	3
PPN Representative – SPC	2	37	16	5
PPN Representative – JPC	3	10	7	1
PPN Representative – LCDC	3	18	6	4
PPN Representative – Other	3	8	8	1
Local Authority Staff	11	14	1	0
Other	3	1	0	0
Total	36	122	50	15

Chart 8: Transparency - Response by Proportion of Stakeholder Group*



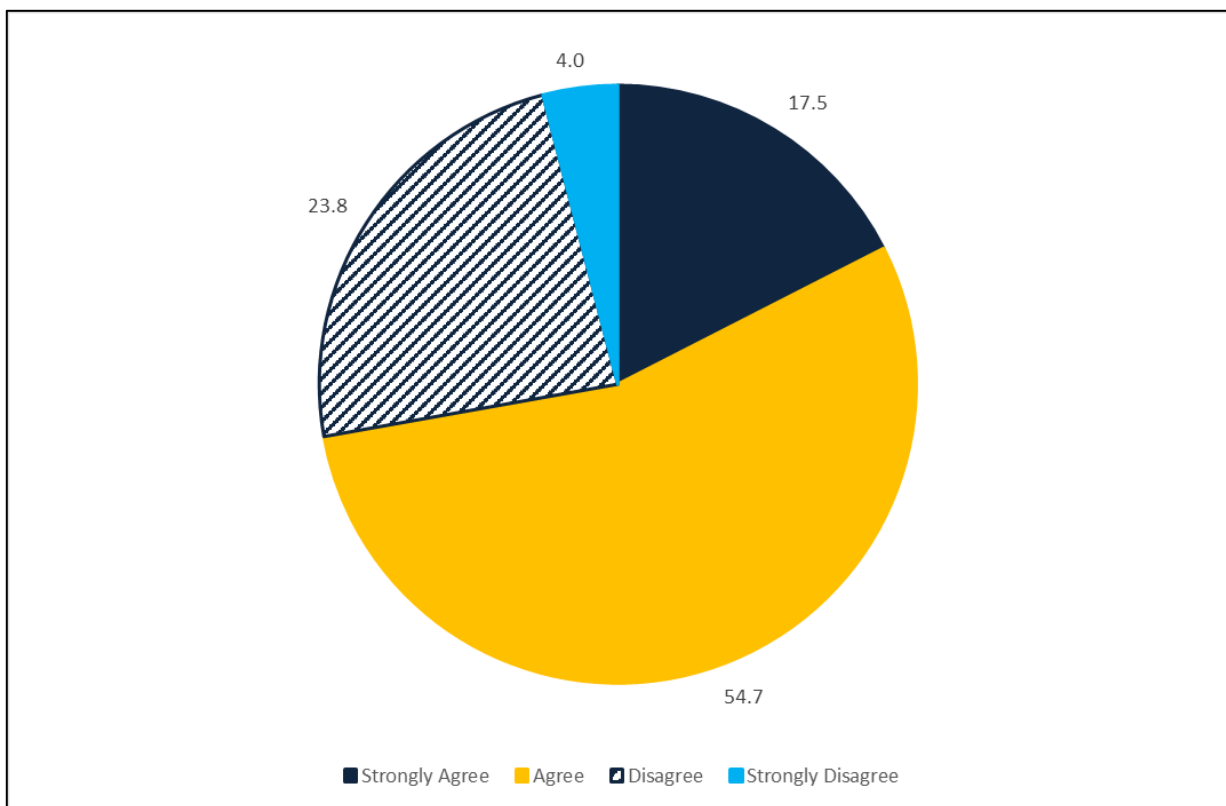
*Note: With the exception of "Other"

Statement 4: The Local Authority and the PPN act openly, responsibly, clearly and accountably in their dealings with each other

We now look to accountability. Similar to the framing of Statement 3, this statement asks respondents to consider accountability in the context of their relationship between the Local Authority and the PPN.

As can be seen from Chart 9, the responses to this statement are similar to those in the previous statement, with 72.2 per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, while almost one in four respondents disagreed and 4 per cent strongly disagreed.

Chart 9: Accountability - Response by Proportion (%) of Stakeholder Group, Total



In considering individual stakeholder groups, again Local Authority Staff overwhelmingly agreed or strongly agreed with this statement (96.2 per cent), two-thirds of 'PPN Representative – SPC' also agreed or strongly agreed. One in ten 'PPN Representative – LCDC' strongly disagreed with this statement, while almost 4 in ten 'PPN Representative – JPC' and one third of 'PPN Representative – SPC' disagreed. Twenty per cent of PPN Secretariat members and 19.4 per cent of PPN Workers strongly agreed with this statement, while more

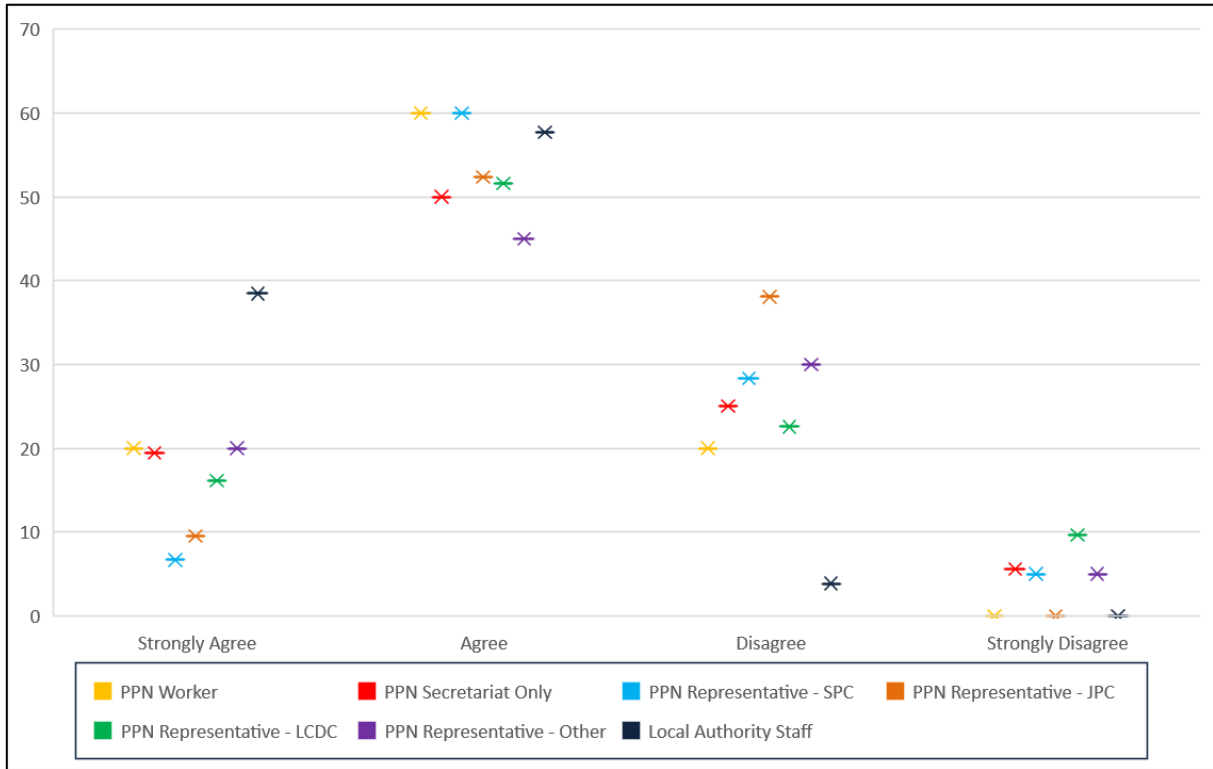
than three in ten PPN Secretariat members and one in five PPN Workers disagreed (Table 6 and Chart 10).

These results indicate that Representatives on the various different Committees and Boards experience varying levels of accountability from the Local Authority, while the Local Authority Staff seems to be strongly of the view that the Local Authorities are accountable. This difference in perception can create conflict if one stakeholder seeks a change in process to enhance their experience while the other sees no need for change.

Table 6: Accountability - Responses by Stakeholder Group, Number

Stakeholder Group	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
PPN Worker	5	15	5	0
PPN Secretariat Only	7	18	9	2
PPN Representative – SPC	4	36	17	3
PPN Representative – JPC	2	11	8	0
PPN Representative – LCDC	5	16	7	3
PPN Representative – Other	4	9	6	1
Local Authority Staff	10	15	1	0
Other	2	2	0	0
Total	39	122	53	9

Chart 10: Accountability - Response by Proportion of Stakeholder Group*



*Note: With the exception of "Other"



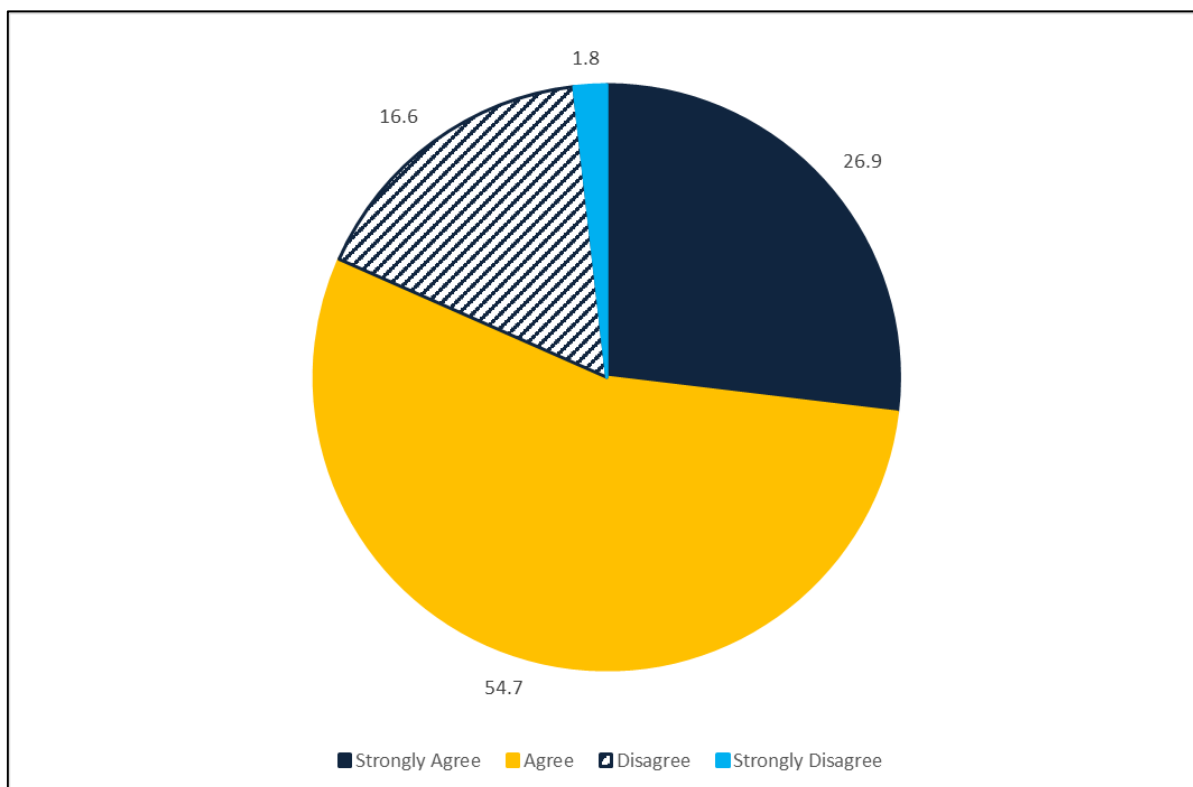
Statement 5: The PPN can act independently of the Local Authority and advocate different positions to those of the Local Authority

The final principles statement to be considered by respondents was in relation to the independence of the PPN and its capacity to advocate different opinions to those of the Local Authority. This is a central tenet of the PPNs, being one of their core Principles and Values (Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, 2017, p. 4), and of participation generally.

More than 4 out of 5 respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement (Chart 11), while 16.6 per cent disagreed and 1.8 per cent strongly disagreed.

While this is certainly a good result for the majority, it is concerning that almost one in five respondents felt that the PPN could not act independently or advocate on behalf of its Member Groups for a different position to that held by the Local Authority.

Chart 11: Independence - Response by Proportion (%) of Stakeholder Group, All



When we consider the responses of the stakeholder groups separately, we see that Local Authority Staff were more likely to agree with this statement, with almost two in five (38.5 per cent) responding that they strongly agreed and over half (53.8 per cent) responding that they agreed. PPN Workers also responded favourably to this statement, with 20 per cent strongly agreeing and 70 per cent agreeing.

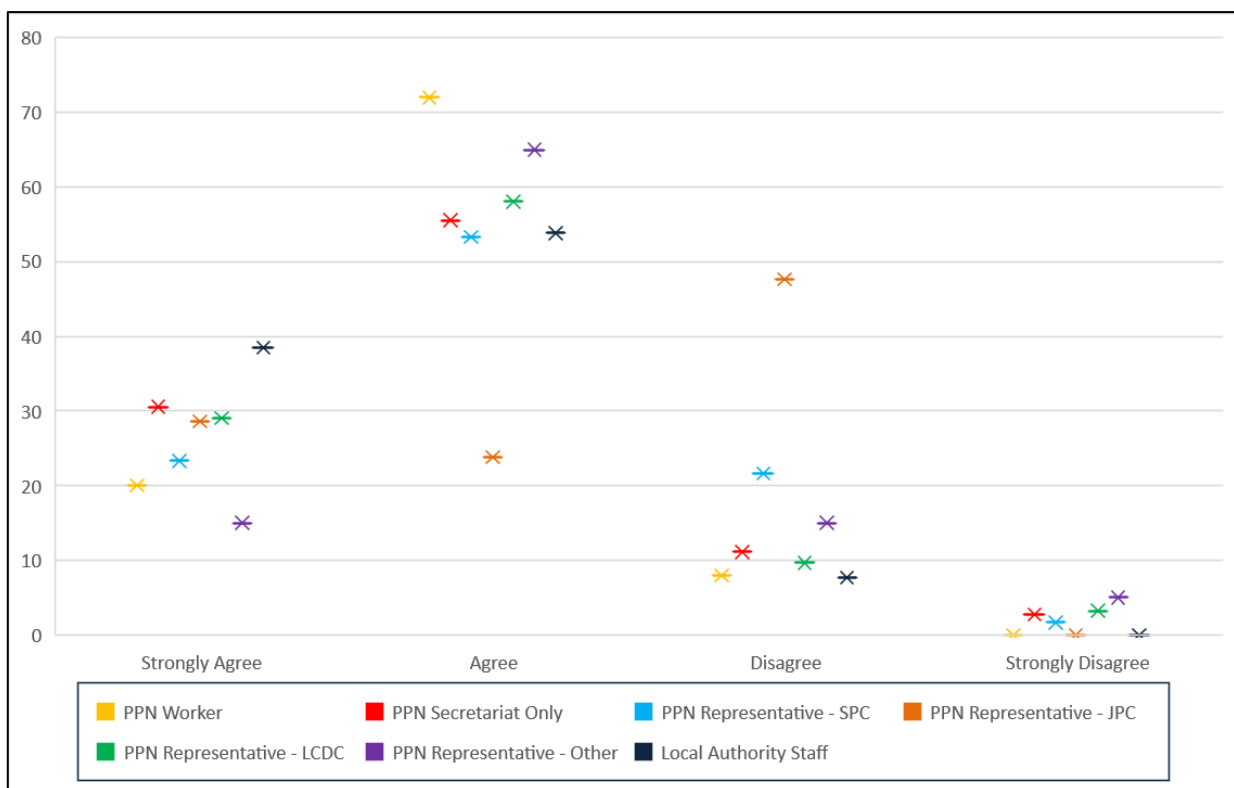
While more than half of the ‘PPN Representative – JPC’ agreed with this statement (52.4 per cent), this group had the highest proportion of respondents who disagreed with this statement (47.4 per cent). This was followed by ‘PPN Representative – SPC’ with almost one in four disagreeing (21.7 per cent responded that they disagreed and 1.7 per cent strongly disagreed) (Table 7 and Chart 12).

Table 7: Independence - Responses by Stakeholder Group, Number

Stakeholder Group	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
PPN Worker	5	18	2	0
PPN Secretariat Only	11	20	4	1

PPN Representative – SPC	14	32	13	1
PPN Representative – JPC	6	5	10	0
PPN Representative – LCDC	9	18	3	1
PPN Representative – Other	3	13	3	1
Local Authority Staff	10	14	2	0
Other	2	2	0	0
Total	60	122	37	4

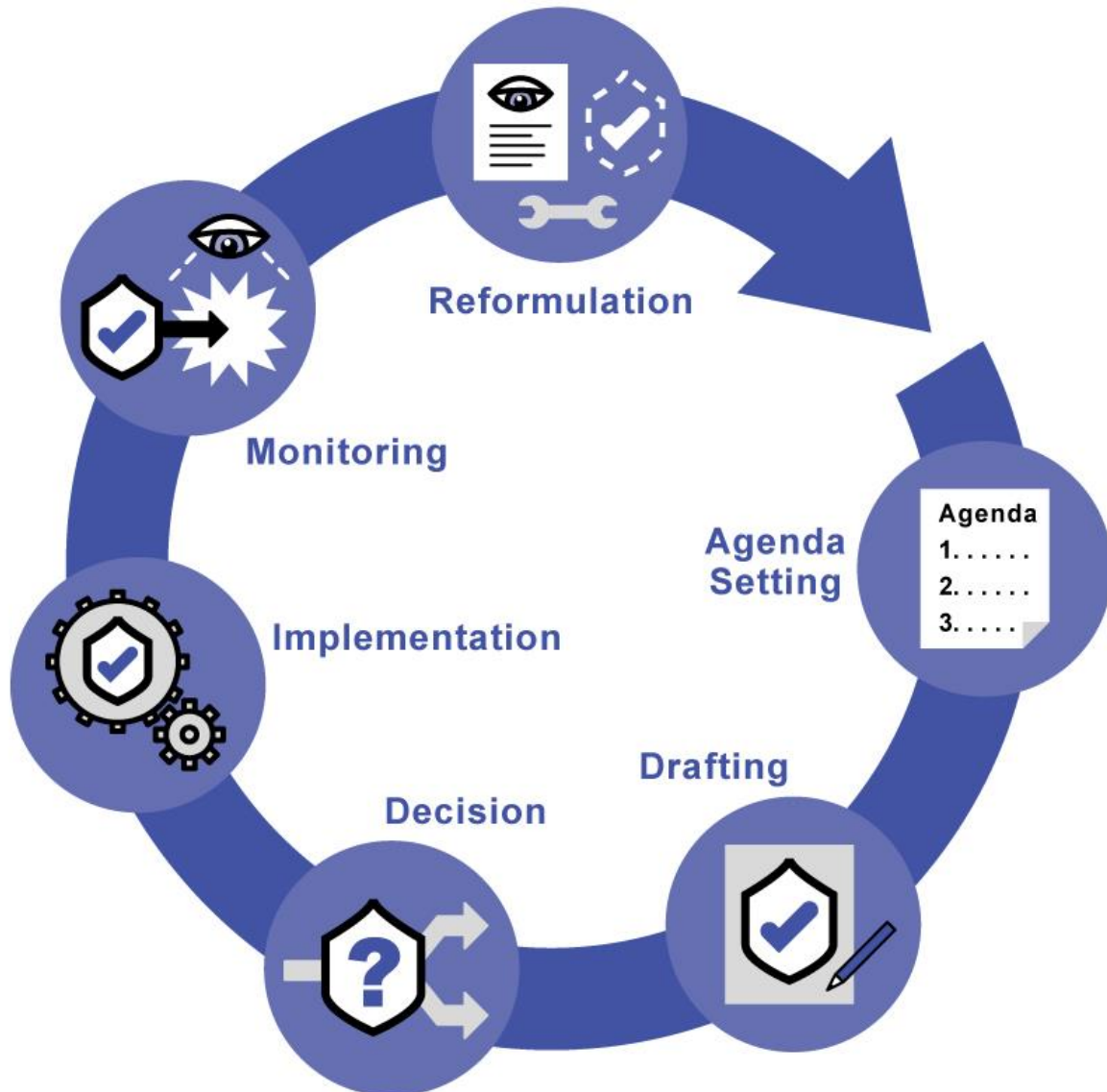
Chart 12: Independence - Response by Proportion of Stakeholder Group*



*Note: With the exception of "Other"

It is interesting to note that, in the main, the statements which referred to the relationship between the PPN and the Local Authority received a more positive response than that which specifically referenced participation in the decision-making process. The next section of this paper will now explore the respondents' views on the levels of participation achieved at each stage of the decision-making process.

Levels of Participation at each stage of the Decision-Making Process



As discussed in the previous section of this paper, the Council of Europe identifies six steps in the decision-making process: Agenda-Setting; Drafting; Decision; Implementation; Monitoring; and Reformulation (Council of Europe, 2009). For this research, respondents were asked to consider these steps using the following definitions:

Agenda-Setting

Setting the agenda for the meeting / new year / 5-year term of office.

Drafting

Writing Local Authority policies and procedures, community development plans and other policy documents of relevance to the community.

Decision

The process of decision-making about a policy or procedure.

Implementation

Putting policy into practice.

Monitoring

Monitoring and assessing the outcomes of the policy or procedure.

Reformulation

Using the information gathered in the monitoring step to evaluate and reformulate the policy or procedure.

For each stage of the decision-making process defined above, respondents were also asked to consider their experience in terms of the Council of Europe's four-stage model, using the following definitions:

Information

The Local Authority decides or does everything and informs the PPN afterwards.

Consultation

The Local Authority requests inputs from the PPN on certain areas, selected by the Local Authority.

Dialogue

The Local Authority retains control of the process, but allows the PPN to suggest inputs.

Partnership

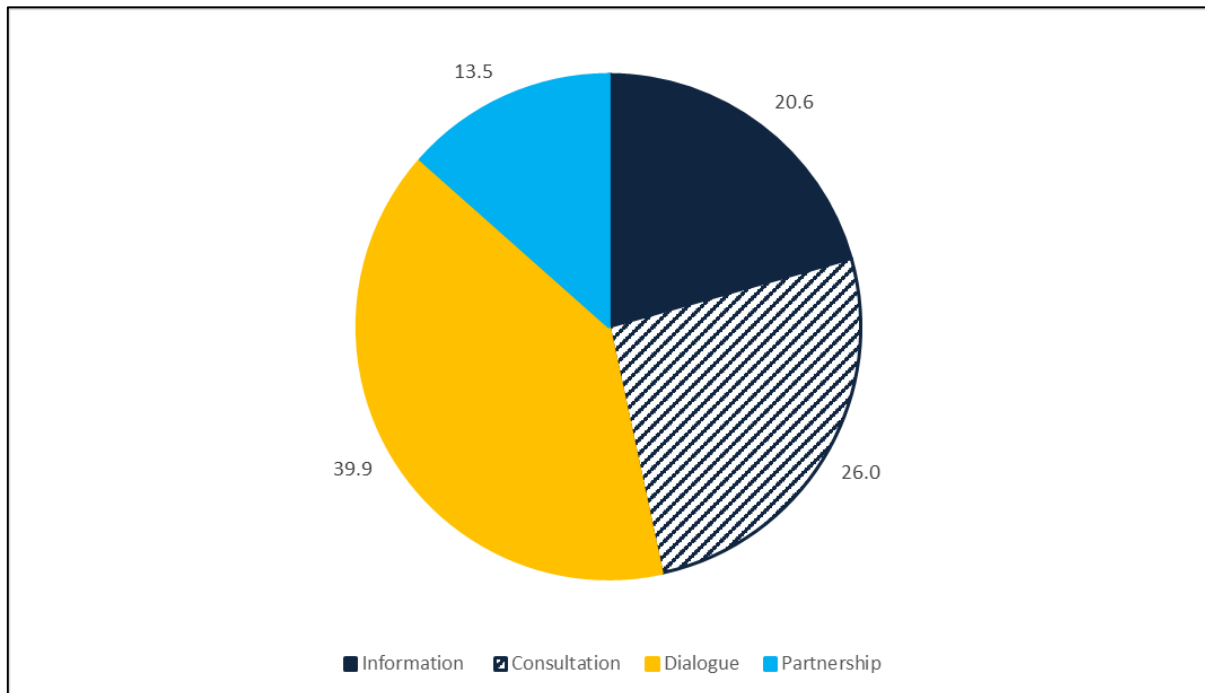
The Local Authority and PPN collaborate in all aspects of the process.



1. **Agenda-Setting**

When it comes to setting the agenda for the decision-making process, whether that be for an individual meeting, the new year or the 5-year term of office, just over one in five respondents felt that their engagement was still at the information stage; that is, the Local Authority decides or does everything and informs the PPN after the event. Just over one in four (26 per cent) felt that they were consulted by the Local Authority, almost two in five respondents (39.9 per cent) responded that the Local Authority retains control of the process, but allows the PPN to suggest inputs (Dialogue); and 13.5 per cent responded that the agenda was set in partnership between the Local Authority and the PPN (Chart 13).

Chart 13: Agenda-Setting - Response by Proportion (%) of Stakeholder Group, All



When we compare the responses between stakeholder groups (Table 8 and Chart 14), we see that the responses vary somewhat, depending on the group involved. More than a quarter of 'PPN Representative – SPC' respondents (26.7 per cent), almost one quarter of 'PPN Worker' and 'PPN Representatives – JPC' (24 and 23.8 per cent respectively), and one in five of 'PPN Secretariat Only', 'PPN Representative – LCDC' and 'PPN Representative – Other' (19.4, 19.4 and 20 per cent respectively) respondents felt that the PPN were presented with information after the Local Authority had already made the decision when it came to agenda-setting (Information stage), compared to just 7.7 per cent of Local Authority Staff respondents.

At the other end of the participation stages, we see that almost one in five 'PPN Secretariat Only' respondents, 16.1 per cent of 'PPN Representative – LCDC' respondents, 15.4 per cent of Local Authority Staff respondents, and 10 per cent of both 'PPN Representative – SPC' and 'PPN Representative – Other' respondents felt that the Local Authority and PPN set the agenda in partnership, compared to 8 per cent of 'PPN Worker' respondents.

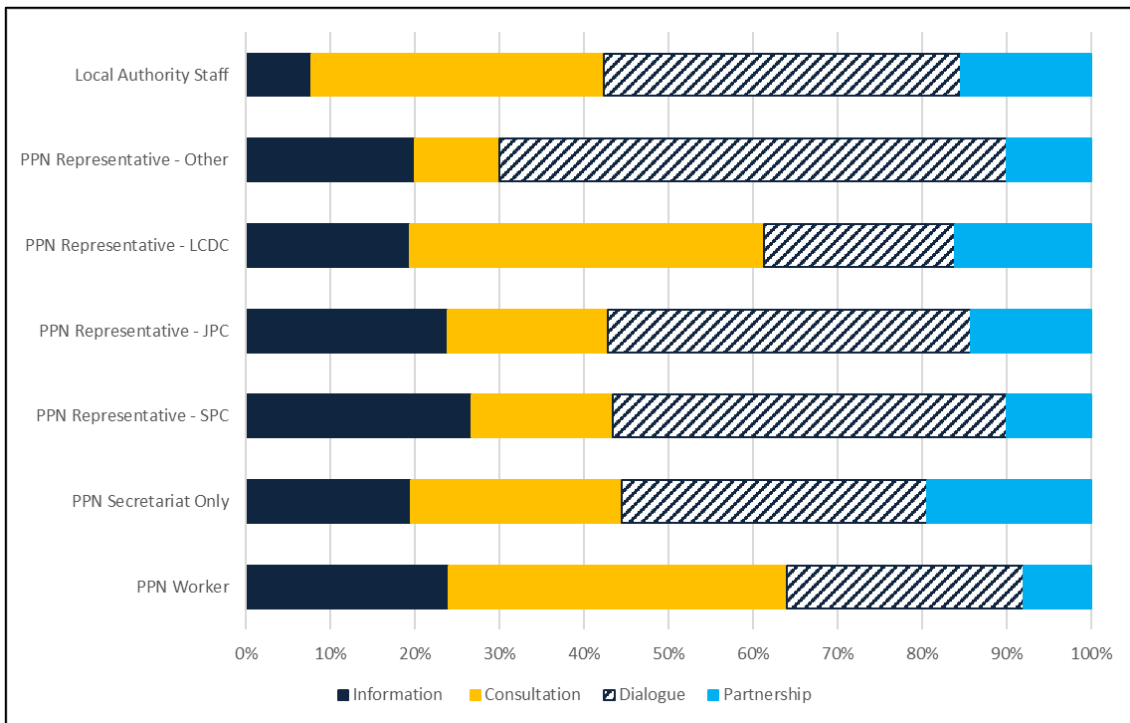
The majority of respondents felt that participation in this part of the decision-making process was somewhere in the middle. 60 per cent of 'PPN Representative – Other' felt that the Local Authority

controlled the process, but allowed the PPN to input (Dialogue), as did almost half of 'PPN Representative – SPC' (46.7 per cent), and more than two in five of both 'PPN Representative – JPC' and 'Local Authority Staff' respondents (42.9 per cent and 42.3 per cent respectively). This compares to 22.6 per cent of 'PPN Representative – LCDC' respondents, who were more likely to respond that the Local Authority requested inputs on areas they select (Consultation – 41.9 per cent).

Table 8: Agenda-Setting - Response by Stakeholder Group, Number

Stakeholder Group	Information	Consultation	Dialogue	Partnership
PPN Worker	6	10	7	2
PPN Secretariat Only	7	9	13	7
PPN Representative – SPC	16	10	28	6
PPN Representative – JPC	5	4	9	3
PPN Representative – LCDC	6	13	7	5
PPN Representative – Other	4	2	12	2
Local Authority Staff	2	9	11	4
Other	0	1	2	1
Total	46	58	89	30

Chart 14: Agenda-Setting - Response by Proportion of Stakeholder Group*



*Note: With the exception of "Other"



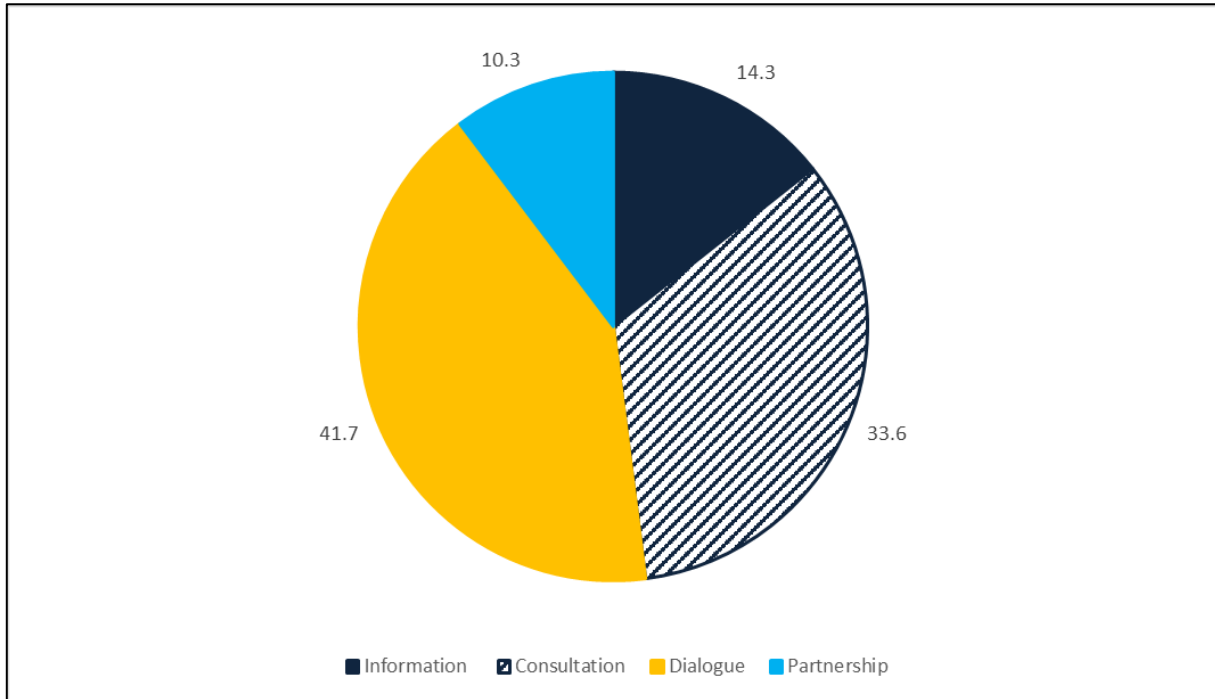
2. Drafting

For the Drafting stage of the decision-making process, respondents were asked to consider the engagement of the PPN when it came to writing Local Authority policies and procedures, community development plans and other policy documents of relevance to the community.

Taken as a whole, the responses indicate that participation tends to be mid-level, with just over one third (33.6 per cent) responding that the Local Authority requests inputs from the PPN on certain areas which the Local Authority selects at its discretion (Consultation), and more than two in five (41.7 per cent) responding that the Local

Authority retains control of the process but allows the PPN to suggest inputs (Dialogue). One in ten respondents felt there was a partnership approach to drafting of local government policies and 14.3 per cent responded that they were provided with information only.

Chart 15: Drafting - Response by Proportion (%) of Stakeholder Group, All



Breaking these responses down by stakeholder group (Table 9 and Chart 16), we see a similar pattern of responses to those provided when considering the Agenda-Setting stage.

Almost fourteen per cent of 'PPN Secretariat Only' respondents felt that there was partnership in this stage of the process, as did 11.7 per cent of 'PPN Representative – SPC' respondents and 11.5 per cent of Local Authority Staff. One in ten of 'PPN Representative – Other', 'PPN Representative – LCDC', and 'PPN Representative – JPC' (10 per cent, 9.7 per cent and 9.5 per cent respectively) also responded that drafting was undertaken in partnership between the Local Authority and PPN. This compares with the 'PPN Worker' respondents, at just 4 per cent.

A higher proportion of most stakeholder groups felt that PPNs were at the Dialogue stage of participation when it came to drafting policies, with half of 'PPN Representative – SPC' and 'Local Authority Staff' respondents, 45.2 per cent of 'PPN Representative – LCDC'

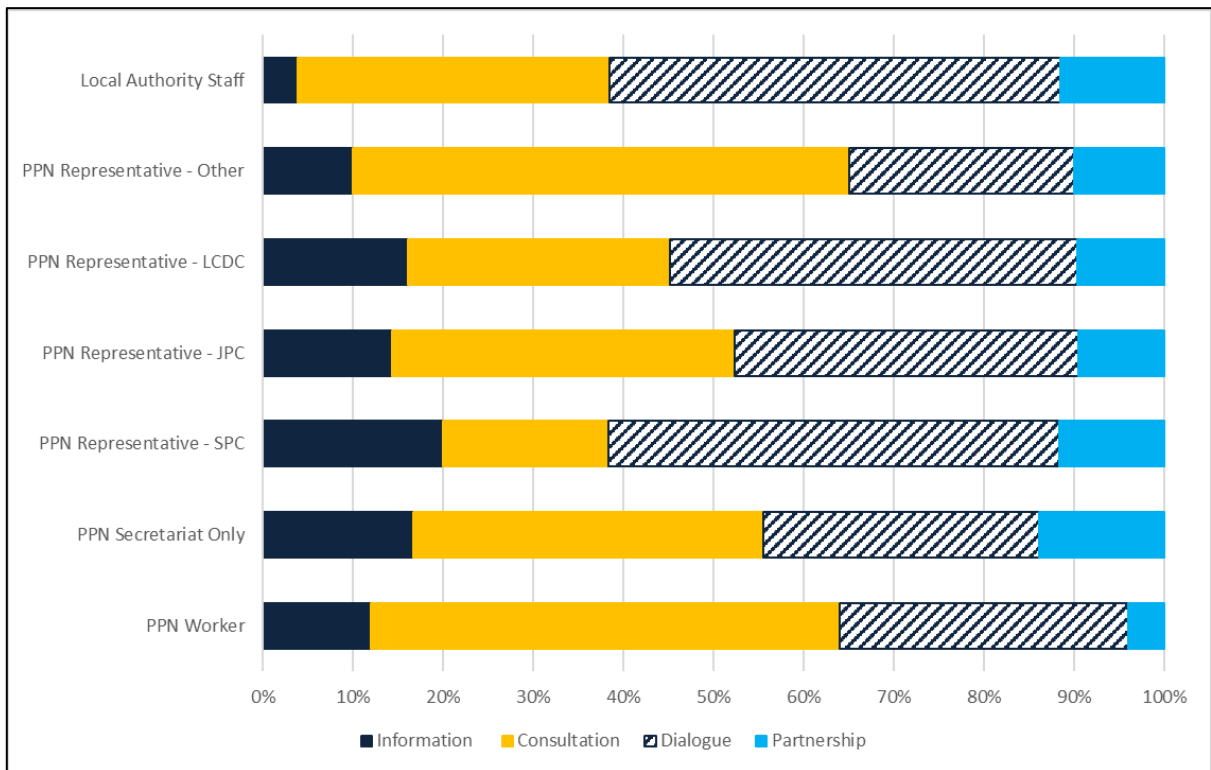
respondents, 38.1 per cent of 'PPN Representatives – LCDC' respondents and at least one out of four of all other stakeholder groups responding in this way. The exceptions were 'PPN Worker' and 'PPN Representative – Other' respondents, with over half (52 per cent and 55 per cent respectively) responding that they felt PPN participation in this part of the decision-making process was at the Consultation stage.

One in five 'PPN Representative – SPC' respondents felt that PPNs had the lowest level of participation – Information – in this stage of the decision-making process, as did over 16 per cent of 'PPN Secretariat Only' and 'PPN Representative – LCDC' respondents (16.7 per cent and 16.1 per cent respectively), followed by 14.3 per cent of the 'PPN Representative – JPC' respondents and 10 per cent of 'PPN Representative – Other' respondents. The respondent group least likely to take this view were 'Local Authority Staff', with just 3.8 per cent.

Table 9: Drafting - Response by Stakeholder Group, Number

Stakeholder Group	Information	Consultation	Dialogue	Partnership
PPN Worker	3	13	8	1
PPN Secretariat Only	6	14	11	5
PPN Representative – SPC	12	11	30	7
PPN Representative – JPC	3	8	8	2
PPN Representative – LCDC	5	9	14	3
PPN Representative – Other	2	11	5	2
Local Authority Staff	1	9	13	3
Other	0	0	4	0
Total	32	75	93	23

Chart 16: Drafting - Response by Proportion of Stakeholder Group*



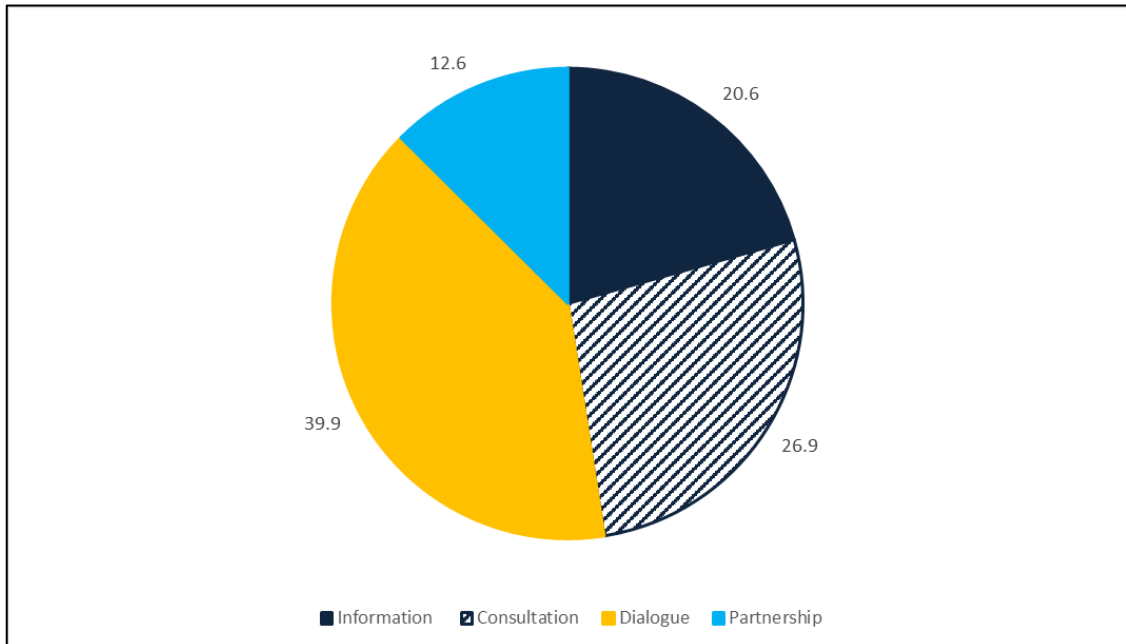
*Note: With the exception of "Other"



3. Decision-making

For the Decision-making step, respondents were asked to consider the level of participation of the PPN in process of decision-making about a policy or procedure. More than one in five respondents believe that PPNs were provided with information after the event (20.6 per cent), more than one in four responded that they were consulted (26.9 per cent), almost two in five (39.9 per cent) responded that decisions were made as a result of a dialogue, where the Local Authority retains control of the process but allows the PPN to make suggestions, and 12.6 per cent responded that decisions were made in partnership between the Local Authority and the PPN (Chart 17).

Chart 17: Decision-making - Response by Proportion (%) of Stakeholder Group, All



The stakeholder group most likely to respond that this stage of the process was conducted in partnership was 'Local Authority Staff' (19.2 per cent), followed by 'PPN Secretariat Only' (16.7 per cent) (Table 10 and Chart 18).

Similar to the previous step in the decision-making process, a higher proportion of most stakeholder groups responded that the PPNs were at the Dialogue stage, with 57.7 per cent of 'Local Authority Staff' and 57.1 per cent of 'PPN Representative – JPC' respondents, and more than two in five of each of the 'PPN Representative – LCDC', 'PPN Secretariat Only' and 'PPN Representative – SPC' (41.9 per cent, 41.7 per cent and 40 per cent respectively) giving this response.

More than one in five 'PPN Representative – JPC' and 'PPN Representative – LCDC' respondents (28.6 per cent and 25.8 per cent respectively) responded that PPNs were consulted, as did 23.1 per cent of 'Local Authority Staff' respondents, 20 per cent of 'PPN Representative – SPC' respondents, and 19.4 per cent of 'PPN Secretariat Only' respondents. An outlier here was the group 'PPN Worker' respondents, with almost half (48 per cent) responding that PPNs were consulted.

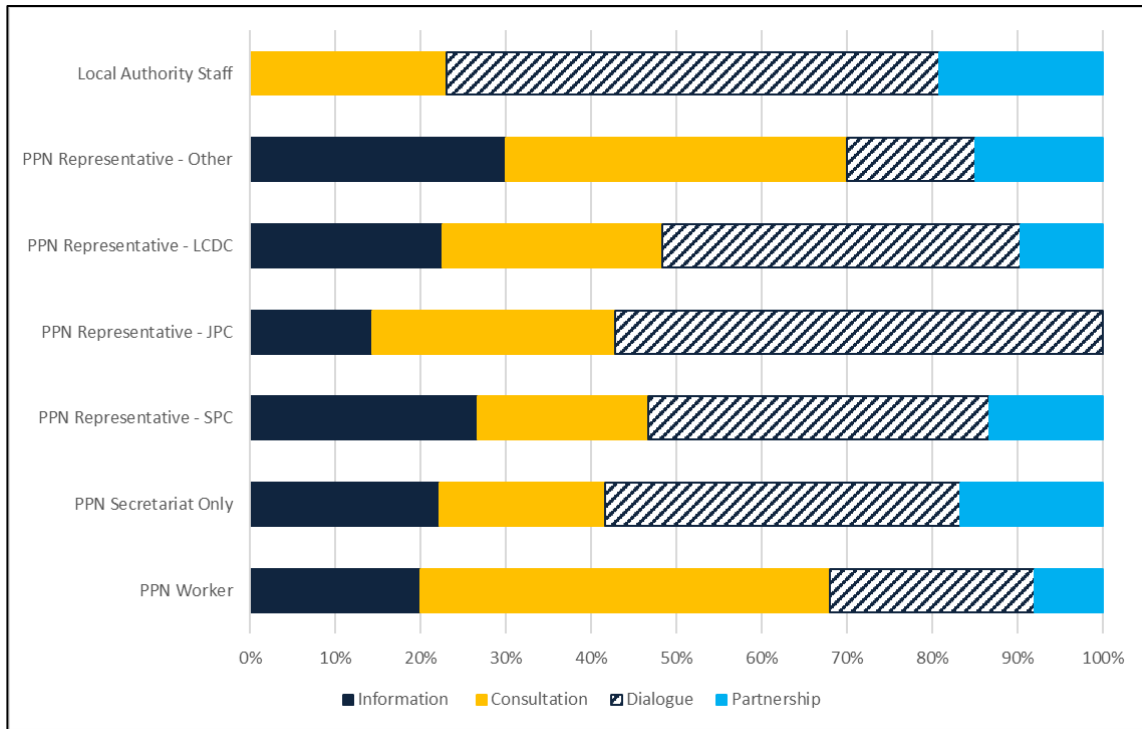
The group most likely to respond that the PPN were at the lowest end of the participation model (Information) when it came to decision-making was the 'PPN Representative – SPC' respondent group, with 26.7 per cent, followed by 'PPN Representative – LCDC' (22.6 per cent) and 'PPN Secretariat Only' (22.2 per cent). No 'Local Authority Staff' respondents felt that the PPN were provided with information only.

Table 10: Decision-making - Response by Stakeholder Group, Number

Stakeholder Group	Information	Consultation	Dialogue	Partnership
PPN Worker	5	12	6	2
PPN Secretariat Only	8	7	15	6
PPN Representative – SPC	16	12	24	8
PPN Representative – JPC	3	6	12	0
PPN Representative – LCDC	7	8	13	3

PPN Representative – Other	6	8	3	3
Local Authority Staff	0	6	15	5
Other	1	1	1	1
Total	46	60	89	28

Chart 18: Decision-making - Response by Proportion of Stakeholder Group*



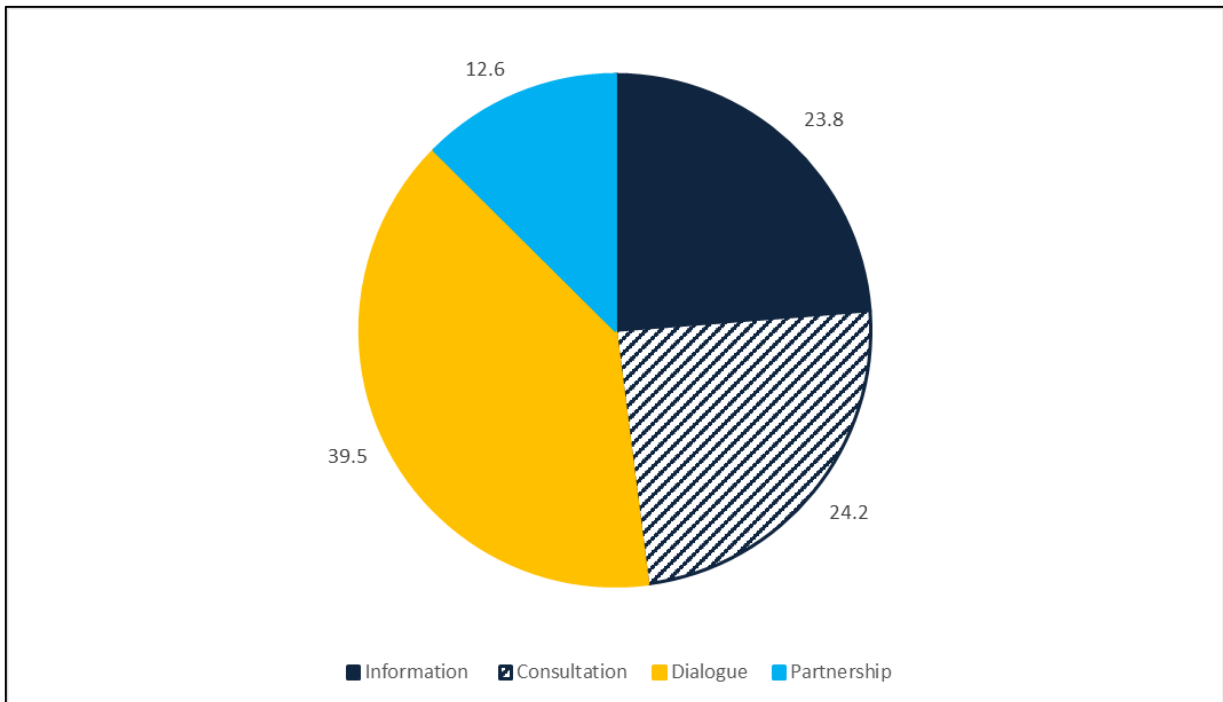
*Note: With the exception of "Other"



4. Implementation

When it came to the implementation of decisions, putting policy into practice, a larger cohort responded that the PPN was at the information stage (23.8 per cent) than any of the previous stages. Almost one in four (24.2 per cent) responded that the PPN was consulted, almost two in five (39.5 per cent) responded that the Local Authority retained control of the process but allowed input by the PPN, and 12.6 per cent responded that policies were implemented in partnership between the Local Authority and the PPN (Chart 19).

Chart 19: Implementation - Response by Proportion (%) of Stakeholder Group, All



This is also reflected in the responses by some of the stakeholder groups (Table 11 and Chart 20), with two in five 'PPN Representative – Other' respondents, 28.3 per cent of 'PPN Representative – SPC' respondents, 28 per cent of 'PPN Worker' respondents and 27.8 per cent of 'PPN Secretariat Only' respondents selecting 'Information' in response to this statement. 'Local Authority Staff' respondents were least likely to respond that the PPNs were informed of the implementation of policies after the event, at 11.5 per cent.

Between one fifth and one third of almost all stakeholder groups responded that the PPN was consulted, with the exception of the 'Local Authority Staff' respondents, with just 15.4 per cent.

A higher proportion of most respondent groups responded that decisions were implemented in dialogue between the PPN and the

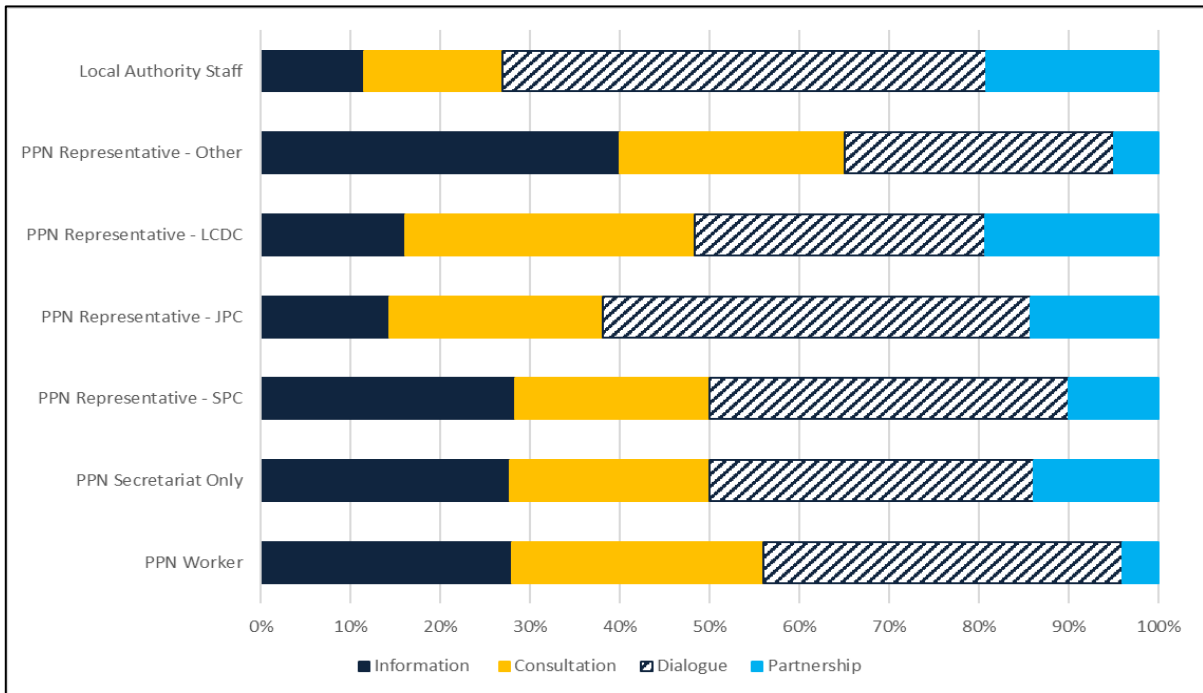
Local Authority, with 53.6 per cent of 'Local Authority Staff' respondents, 47.6 per cent of 'PPN Representative – JPC' respondents, 40 per cent of each of the 'PPN Representative – SPC' and 'PPN Worker' respondents, 36.1 per cent of 'PPN Secretariat Only' respondents and 30 per cent of 'PPN Representative - Other' respondents providing this response. The same proportion of 'PPN Representative – LCDC' respondents indicated that PPNs were at the Dialogue stage in the process as the Consultation stage (32.3 per cent).

Almost one in five 'PPN Representative – LCDC' respondents and 'Local Authority Staff' respondents felt implementation of policies was conducted in partnership between the PPN and the Local Authority (19.4 per cent and 19.2 per cent respectively), as did 14.3 per cent of 'PPN Representative – JPC' respondents, 13.9 per cent of 'PPN Secretariat Only' respondents, and 10 per cent of 'PPN Representative – SPC' respondents. Just 5 per cent of 'PPN Representative – Other' and 4 per cent of 'PPN Workers' felt that this stage was conducted in partnership.

Table 11: Implementation - Response by Stakeholder Group, Number

Stakeholder Group	Information	Consultation	Dialogue	Partnership
PPN Worker	7	7	10	1
PPN Secretariat Only	10	8	13	5
PPN Representative – SPC	17	13	24	6
PPN Representative – JPC	3	5	10	3
PPN Representative – LCDC	5	10	10	6
PPN Representative – Other	8	5	6	1
Local Authority Staff	3	4	14	5
Other	0	2	1	1
Total	53	54	88	28

Chart 20: Implementation - Response by Proportion of Stakeholder Group*



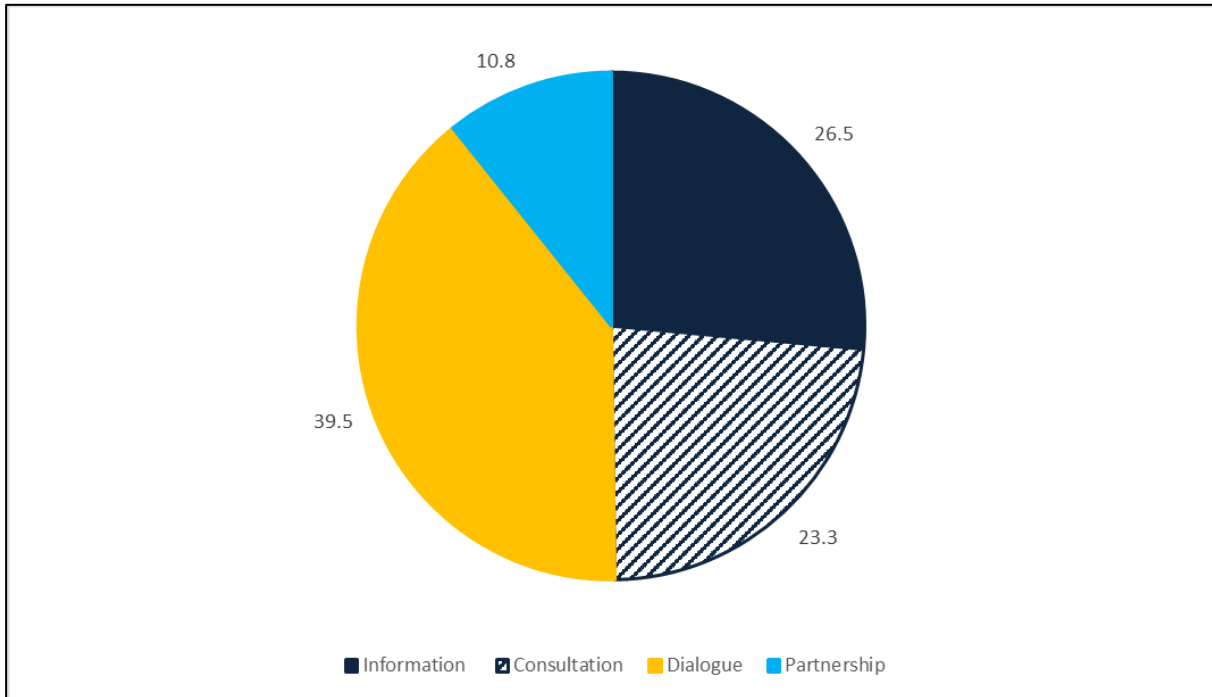
*Note: With the exception of "Other"



5. Monitoring

More than one in five respondents (26.5 per cent) felt that the process of monitoring and assessing the outcomes of policies and procedures was conducted by the Local Authority, with the PPN informed after the event, 23.3 per cent responded that this stage was conducted in consultation with the PPN, almost two in five (39.5 per cent) responded that there was dialogue between the Local Authority and PPN at this stage of the decision-making process and 10.8 per cent felt that this was done in partnership between the PPN and the Local Authority (Chart 21).

Chart 21: Monitoring - Response by Proportion (%) of Stakeholder Group, All



A higher proportion of 'PPN Worker' respondents (48 per cent) than others responded that monitoring was conducted by the Local Authority (Table 12 and Chart 22), with the PPN informed afterwards. This was followed by almost one third of 'PPN Representative – SPC' respondents (31.7 per cent), 29 per cent of 'PPN Representative – LCDC' respondents, 23.8 per cent of 'PPN Representative – JPC' respondents, 22.2 per cent of 'PPN Secretariat Only' respondents and 15 per cent of 'PPN Representative – Other' respondents. The respondent group least likely to select 'Information' for this stage of the process was the 'Local Authority Staff' group.

Between one fifth and one quarter of most respondent groups felt that monitoring was conducted in consultation between the Local Authority and the PPN (19.2 per cent to 23.8 per cent), with the exception of the 'PPN Representative – Other' respondents, with whom it was two out of five.

Over half of both the 'Local Authority Staff' respondents and the 'PPN Representative – JPC' (57.7 per cent and 52.4 per cent respectively) felt that monitoring was conducted within a dialogue between the Local Authority and the PPN, followed by 47.2 per cent of 'PPN Secretariat Only' respondents, 35 per cent of 'PPN Representative – SPC' respondents, 32.3 per cent of 'PPN Representative – LCDC'

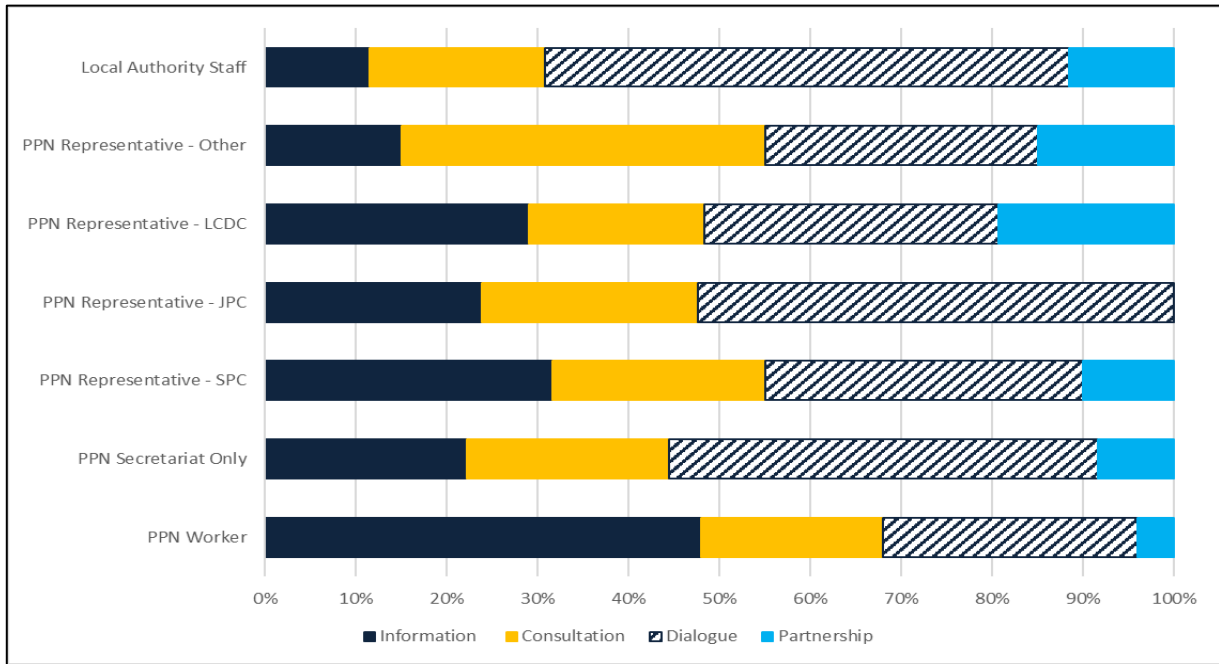
respondents and 30 per cent of 'PPN Representative – Other' respondents.

Almost one in five 'PPN Representative – LCDC' respondents (19.4 per cent) responded that monitoring was conducted in partnership between the Local Authority and PPN, followed by 15 per cent of 'PPN Representative – Other' respondents, 11.5 per cent of 'Local Authority Staff' respondents and one in ten 'PPN Representative – SPC' respondents. No 'PPN Representative – JPC' respondents felt that a partnership approach was taken to monitoring.

Table 12: Monitoring - Response by Stakeholder Group, Number

Stakeholder Group	Information	Consultation	Dialogue	Partnership
PPN Worker	12	5	7	1
PPN Secretariat Only	8	8	17	3
PPN Representative – SPC	19	14	21	6
PPN Representative – JPC	5	5	11	0
PPN Representative – LCDC	9	6	10	6
PPN Representative – Other	3	8	6	3
Local Authority Staff	3	5	15	3
Other	0	1	1	2
Total	59	52	88	24

Chart 22: Monitoring - Response by Proportion of Stakeholder Group*



*Note: With the exception of "Other"

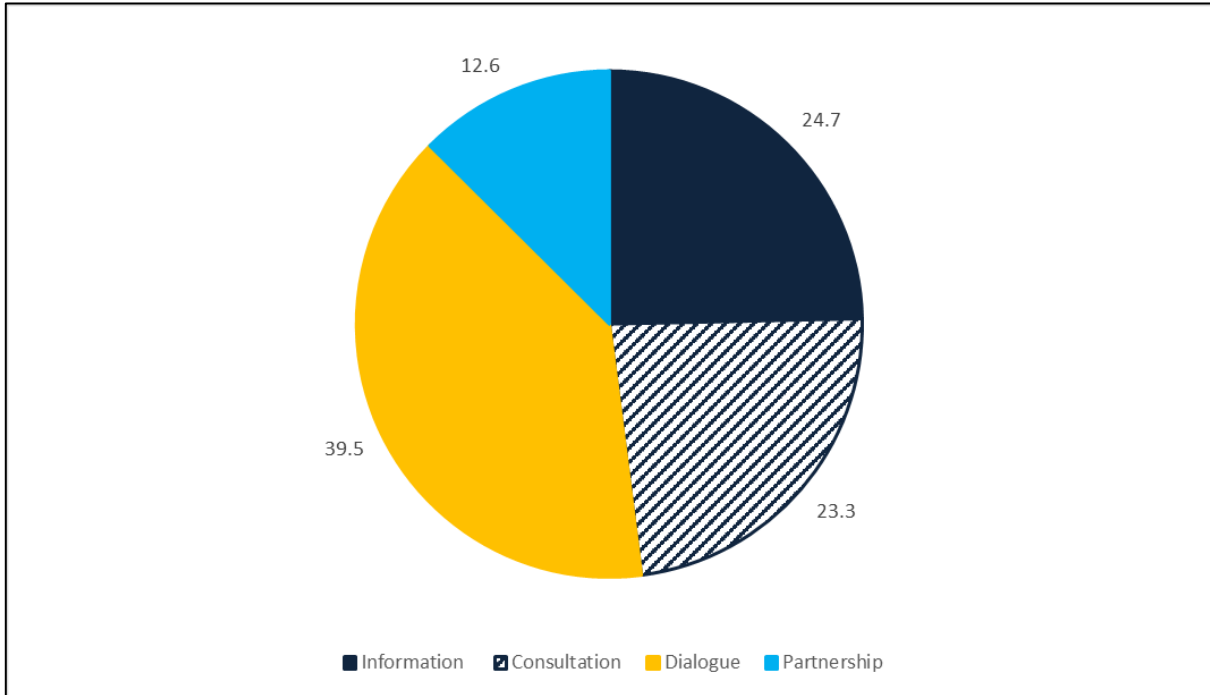


6. Reformulation

The final stage of the decision-making process identified by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2009) is reformulation, defined for this purpose as using the information gathered in the monitoring step to evaluate and reformulate the policy or procedure.

Almost one in four respondents (24.7 per cent) felt that this was conducted by the Local Authority, with the PPN informed after the event, 23.3 per cent responded that it was conducted in consultation with the PPN, almost two in five (39.5 per cent) responded that it was a process of dialogue, and 12.6 per cent felt it was conducted in partnership (Chart 23).

Chart 23: Reformulation - Response by Proportion (%) of Stakeholder Group, All



Three in ten 'PPN Worker', 'PPN Representative – SPC' and 'PPN Representative – LCDC' respondents (32 per cent, 30 per cent and 29 per cent respectively) believe that information on reformulation was provided to the PPN following Local Authority action. One quarter of 'PPN Representative – Other' and almost one in five 'PPN Secretariat Only' and 'PPN Representative – JPC' (19.4 per cent and 19 per cent respectively) also responded in this way, compared to 15.4 per cent of 'Local Authority Staff' respondents.

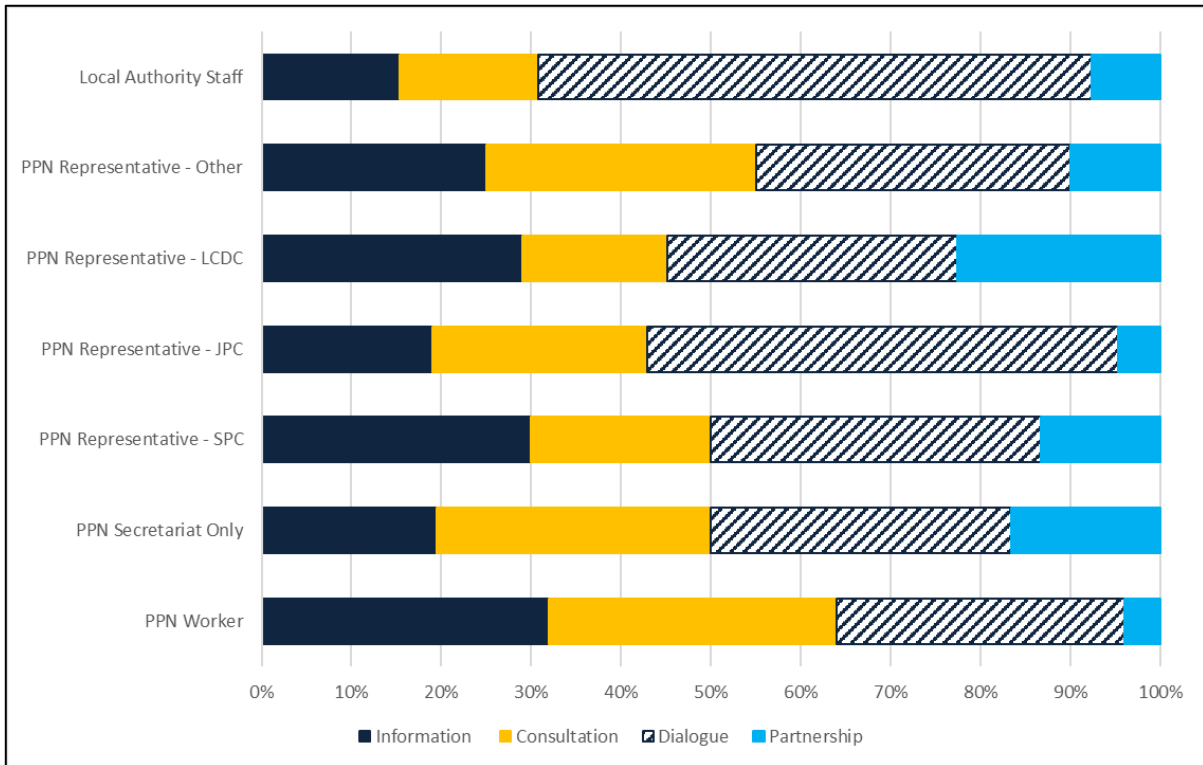
At the other end of the participation spectrum, 22.6 per cent of 'PPN Representative – LCDC' respondents felt that reformulation was conducted in partnership between the Local Authority and the PPN, followed by 16.7 per cent of 'PPN Secretariat Only' respondents and 13.3 per cent of 'PPN Representative – SPC' respondents. A lower proportion of 'Local Authority Staff' respondents (7.7 per cent) felt that reformulation was a partnership compared to any other stage in the process.

Over half of the 'Local Authority Staff' respondents and 'PPN Representative – JPC' respondents (61.5 per cent and 52.4 per cent respectively) indicated that reformulation was conducted as part of a dialogue process between the Local Authority and the PPN, with between 32 and 36.7 per cent of all other stakeholder groups providing this response (Table 13 and Chart 24).

Table 13: Reformulation - Response by Stakeholder Group, Number

Stakeholder Group	Information	Consultation	Dialogue	Partnership
PPN Worker	8	8	8	1
PPN Secretariat Only	7	11	12	6
PPN Representative – SPC	18	12	22	8
PPN Representative – JPC	4	5	11	1
PPN Representative – LCDC	9	5	10	7
PPN Representative – Other	5	6	7	2
Local Authority Staff	4	4	16	2
Other	0	1	2	1
Total	55	52	88	28

Chart 24: Reformulation - Response by Proportion (%) of Stakeholder Group*



Note: With the exception of "Other"

Responses by Stakeholder Group

Overall, the responses to our survey indicate agreement or strong agreement that the principles outlined by the Council of Europe are being implemented when it comes to participation at local government level in Ireland. Similarly, a high proportion of respondents felt that the PPNs had moved beyond the 'Information' and 'Consultation' levels of participation, to the Dialogue level for each stage of the decision-making process. There is, however, some work to be done before 'Partnership' can be achieved at all stages of the decision-making process, as this level was indicated by the lowest proportion of respondents for each stage.

PPN Workers

In considering the responses of each of the stakeholder groups identified, at least 60 per cent of 'PPN Workers' agreed or strongly agreed that the principles of participation were being implemented. There was less consistency in responses from this group when it came to the stages of the decision-making process. When it came to Agenda-Setting, Drafting and Decision-making, the highest proportion of 'PPN Workers' felt that PPNs were consulted, while there was more of a dialogue approach taken when implementing policies and processes. This group also felt that the PPN had the

lowest level of participation, the information level, when it came to monitoring policies and practices, while there was an even split across information, consultation and dialogue levels when it came to reformulation. While this seems broadly positive, there remains between 20 and 32 per cent who responded that the PPN were at the lowest level of participation across each of the decision-making stages, with the exception of Drafting (12 per cent).

PPN Secretariats

The 'PPN Secretariat' respondents were also more likely to agree or strongly agree that the principles of participation were being implemented, with almost 70 per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing with these statements, with the exception of responses to the statement on decision-making processes (Statement 2), where 55.5 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed. This groups was also proportionately more likely to view the level of engagement at all stages of the decision-making process as being at the dialogue level, with the exception of the Drafting stage, where 38.9 per cent felt that the PPN was consulted, compared to 30.6 per cent who responded that participation was at the dialogue level. The lowest proportion of this group felt that the Local Authority and PPNs worked in partnership across all levels, and between one fifth and over one quarter (19.4 per cent to 27.8 per cent) felt that participation was at its lowest level across almost all stages of decision-making (with the exception of Drafting, at 16.7 per cent), signaling that there remains work to be done in this regard.

PPN Representatives - SPC

Over half of the 'PPN Representative – SPC' respondents also responded that the four principles of participation were being implemented, with over 55 per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing with these statements, however a significant proportion did not. Similar to the previous groups, Statement 2 provoked the most negative response, with 23.3 per cent disagreeing and 20 per cent strongly disagreeing. A higher proportion of this group also felt that participation by PPNs in the decision-making process was at the lowest level across all stages (between 20 per cent and 31.7 per cent), while between 35 per cent and 50 per cent felt that there was dialogue at each stage. As with the other groups, the lowest proportion of this group felt that there was partnership in the decision-making process, with just 10 per cent to 13.3 per cent providing this response.

PPN Representatives - JPC

More than 50 per cent of 'PPN Representative – JPC' respondents responded that the four principles of participation were being implemented, with the exception of Statement 2, with which 57.2 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed. While a lower proportion of this group than the previous group felt that the PPN was at the lowest level of participation across all stages of the decision-making process (14.3 per cent to 23.8 per cent), and most felt that there was dialogue, it is interesting to note that none of this group felt there was partnership at the Decision-making or Monitoring stages.

PPN Representative – LCDC

At least 58 per cent of 'PPN Representative – LCDC' respondents felt that all four principles of participation were being implemented. Between 16.1 per cent and 29 per cent responded that the PPNs were being informed at each stage of the decision-making process, while between 9.7 per cent and 22.6 per cent felt that there was partnership. With the exception of the Agenda and Implementation stages, the highest proportion of these respondents to each question felt that there was dialogue between the PPN and the Local Authority (41.9 per cent felt that they were consulted when it came to setting the agenda, compared to 22.6 per cent who felt there was dialogue, and 32.3 per cent responded that they were consulted or engaged in dialogue when it came to implementation).

PPN Representative – Other

As with some of the other respondent groups, the majority of the 'PPN Representative – Other' responded that the principles of participation were being implemented, with the exception of Statement 2, with which 55 per cent disagreed. There was a more even distribution of responses to the questions relating to the stages of participation among this group, with between 10 and 40 per cent feeling that they were at the information level at various stages of the process (drafting and monitoring were the lowest, with 10 per cent and 15 per cent respectively; while decision-making and implementation were the highest with 30 per cent and 40 per cent). Over half of this group felt that they were consulted in the drafting of policies and processes (55 per cent), while one in four responded that there was a dialogue and one in ten responding that there was partnership at this stage. Of this group, a higher proportion felt that there was dialogue in setting the agenda than at any other stage of the process (60 per cent, compared to between 10 per cent and 35 per cent for the other decision-making stages). As with other groups, the lowest proportionate response for each stage of the process was

partnership, with just 5 per cent responding that there was partnership in implementation.

Local Authority Staff

Over 90 per cent of 'Local Authority Staff' agreed or strongly agreed with the statements of principles. This group was also proportionately more likely to respond that there was dialogue between the Local Authority and the PPN at all stages of the decision-making process (from 42.3 per cent when setting the agenda to 61.5 per cent for reformulation). The proportion of respondents in this group who felt that there was partnership at each stage of the process was not broadly out of step with some of the other groups (from 7.7 per cent at reformulation stage to 19.2 per cent at the decision-making and implementation stages).

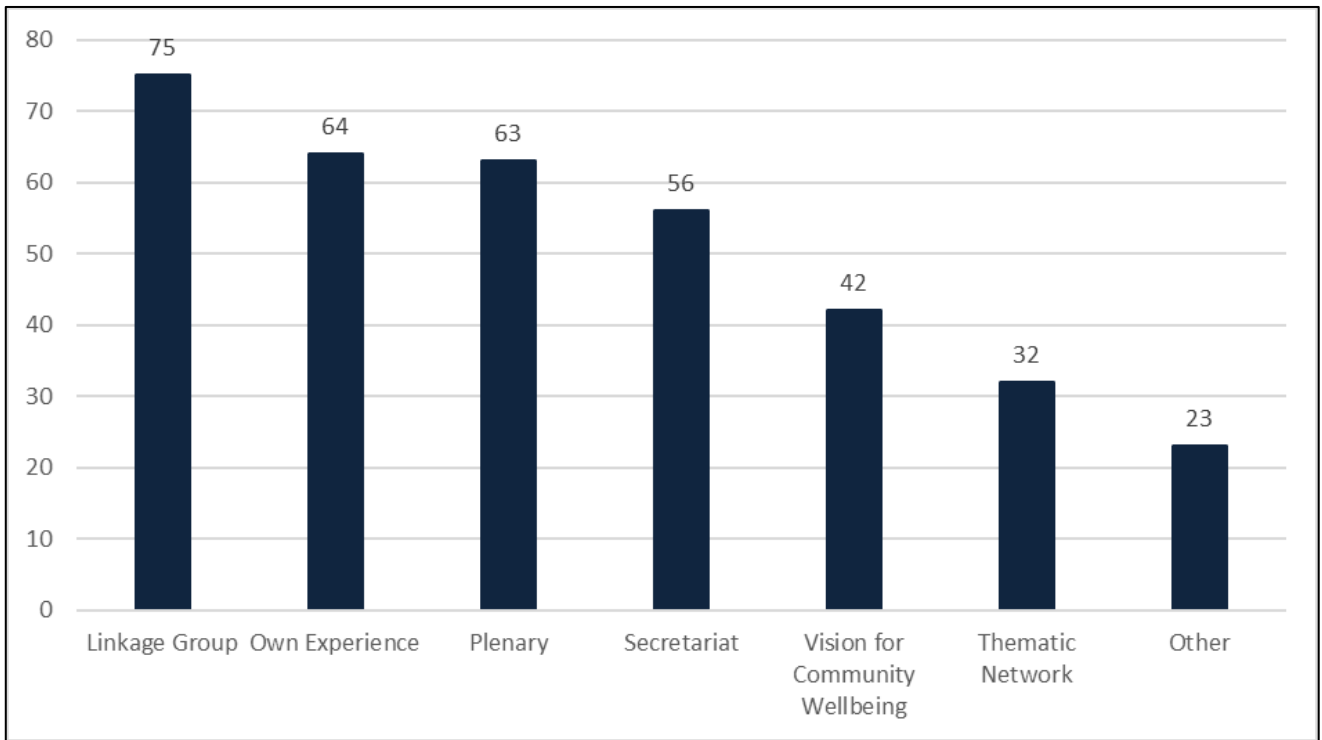
The Representatives' Mandate

The survey also asked how Representatives received their mandate to represent the PPN on the various committees and boards on which they sit. This is an important aspect of the role as it informs how well a Representative can fulfil their function.

As a Representative can get their mandate from several different sources, respondents were asked to choose all that applied in their case. Chart 25 sets out the responses of the 132 PPN Representative respondents.

The majority (56.8 per cent, n=75) used Linkage Groups established by the PPN to support Representatives on a particular committee to provide them with some or all of their mandate. Almost half (48.5 per cent, n=64) drew from their own experience, 47.7 per cent (n=63) received some or all of their mandate from the PPN Plenary, that is all of the Member Groups of the PPN together. More than two in five (n=56) received some or all of their mandate from the PPN Secretariat, the administrative structure of the PPN which puts the strategic decisions of the Plenary into operation. More than three in ten (n=42) looked to the Vision for Community Wellbeing, drafted in consultation with PPN Member Groups to provide a vision for how the PPN wants their community to be under six domains – Health; Economy & Resources; Social & Community Development; Participation, Democracy & Good Governance; Values, Culture & Meaning; and Environment & Sustainability. Almost one quarter (24.2 per cent, n=32) received some or all of their mandate from a Thematic Network established by the PPN around themes or policy areas of relevance to Member Groups (for example, disability networks, social inclusion and so on). And finally, 17.4 per cent (n=23) received their mandate from Other sources which included their College, Local Authority strategic objectives or informal networks).

Chart 25: Representatives Mandate, All Representatives (n=132)



Comments

The final question asked respondents if they had any comments or observations about how the PPN was operating in their area. The responses to this question (n=117) reflect the broad range of experience indicated in the data. The samples selected for inclusion were chosen to reflect as many views as possible and avoid duplication of comments previously made. Where necessary, comments were also anonymised.

Broadly Positive:

“The PPN encourages participation at all levels including at plenary level and through the wellbeing workshops. the information and direction gathered from the communities through the participatory forum and social media platforms of the PPN must inform the local authority policy.”

“Co-operation and trust between the PPN and the LA is building all the time.”

“PPN Representation is welcomed and valued on the whole however a shift is still needed from presentation & feedback to consultation from the start of policy & decision making. Equality of opportunity is also needed as Reps report that the elected members take precedent in training and policy development as well as a feeling that decisions are being made ahead and outside of meetings.”

“PPN is being increasingly consulted and used as method of consultation. It is the go to link with communities.”

“There is a very good professional, working relationship between the PPN and the LA. As the profile and capacity of the PPN has increased, so

too has collaboration on projects, policies and strategies. We expect this will continue to expand.”

“PPN has had challenging times but participation is worthwhile. The Local Authority has been very supportive in particular aspects but it is not transparent or open. Likewise some councillors embrace and welcome PPN participation but others do not.”

“I think participation at decision level is going ok. I think the PPN need to link more with the reps on the SPCs as I would have concerns about information flow from secretariat to spc reps and back again. Overall we have very good participation from PPN on most of our decision making structures.”

“Relationship with the council has greatly improved following change of Director. A greater appreciation of the capacity of the PPN has developed through input via our manager in the pandemic forum. Operational procedures i.e. setting agendas and notification of meetings is still being conducted as it was pre PPN. Recently a request was made for earlier notification to facilitate meaningful consultation with members and also recognising that reps are volunteers that links to policy documents, legislation and background should be provided in relation to each agenda item. Future looks bright.”

Broadly Negative

“The PPN in [AREA] is led by the LA. We are seen as a add on rather than a partner. Having the co-coordinator/resource officer embedded in the LA is not ideal as they have appeared to be working for the LA rather than working with the PPN

secretariat. There is very little trust between the PPN Secretariat and the LA."

"Because of the size and geographical spread of the county we have found it difficult to organise and maintain linkage groups."

"I feel the secretariat do not feed back to the PPN and PPN reps do not feed to their groups and vice versa or to the secretariat."

"My main challenge is that PPNs were designed to influence local policy and decisions but the framework only allows people who are already empowered, via participating in member groups, to do so. It is therefore limited in its equity, exclusionary by design. Couple with that the inherent power dynamics between councils and groups perceived to be competing and the successes seem needlessly limited. Personally, I think a redesign to move towards participatory democracy would be much more effective."

"I don't think the PPNs are taken seriously yet by the LAs. Individual LA staff can be amazing but as a whole we seem to be an annoyance. We don't seem to be able to criticize or take opposing views, if we do there is a feeling that we will be shut out of the little space for input that we have. Committees we have reps on seem to like working with the reps they have and do not want change. This removes the chance to select new candidates and give others a chance. The PPN worker can act as a gatekeeper also keeping us from having input, selecting the minimum amount of info to give to us."

"The experience on SPCs can be very much determined by personalities, particularly that of the Director of Services and the Chairperson.

Gains in relation to engagement have been very hard fought for.

Submissions may be invited from the PPN but we would be hard pressed to identify anywhere they have been incorporated in any significant way

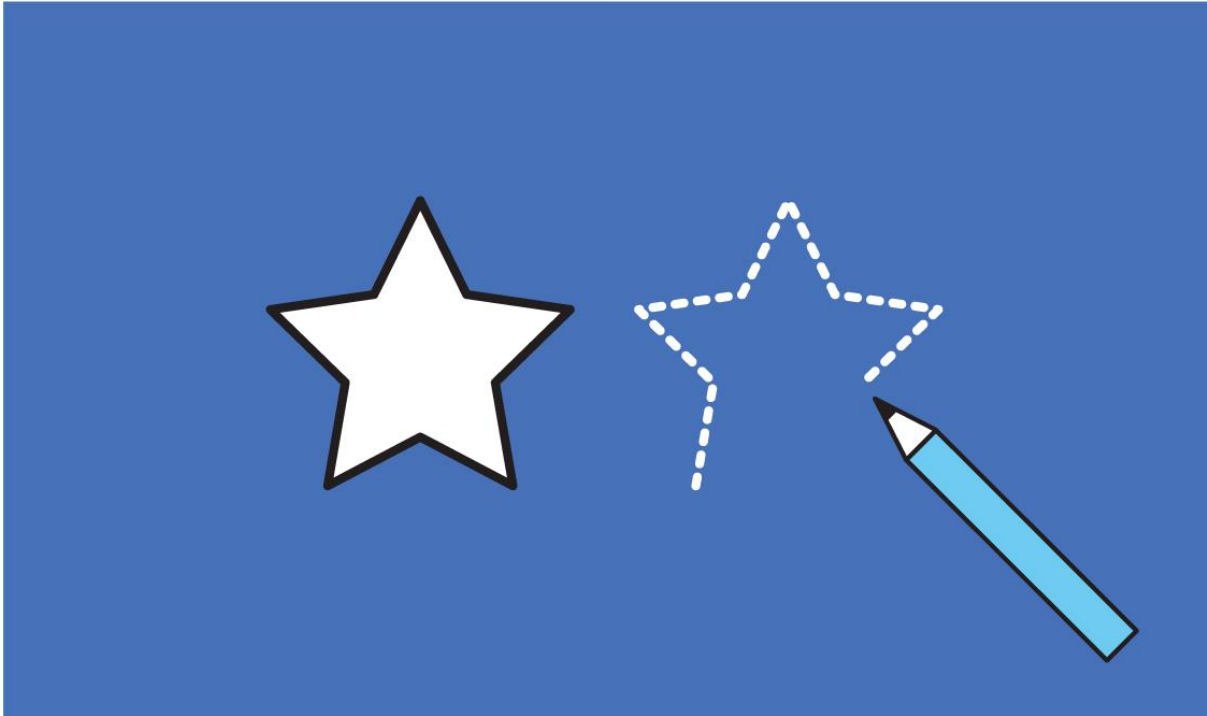
While the LA may invite input from the PPN, that input is rarely acted upon.

There are a number of good people in the LA that have tried/are trying to engage but the institution is very restrictive."

"Firstly I believe there is a need for more supports for the members of the PPN. Also that meetings such as the LCDC and LAG are arranged to facilitate volunteers. That consideration is given by the Local Authority to facilitate volunteers at all times and not paid workers."

"The PPN is very valuable. However in my view it is continue to be a challenge for the PPN to be provided with a meaningful remit in policy formulation and implementation and should be encouraged across all LA functions."

"The PPN is a box ticking exercise. When I asked the previous Reps whether they had had any meaningful input into policies decisions made in the council they told me that they had not. I have had the same experience. I feel that the PPN has very little effect and besides a meeting every now and then, it does little more to engage with local communities besides acting as a distribution mechanism for information."



Section 4: Conclusion and Recommendations

Public Participation Networks (PPNs) are engaging across a range of committees and Boards at local level to influence policies that affect their Member Groups and their communities. While most respondents felt that the principles of participation were being adhered to, it is interesting to note that an exception was made for the principles statement relating to openness in the decision-making process.

It is positive to see that a high proportion of respondents felt that the level of participation across each stage of the decision-making process was at dialogue stage, however there is a significant proportion who responded that participation was still at the lowest level, that the Local Authority provided the information only to the PPN. This is particularly the case for PPN Representatives on the Strategic Policy Committees and the Local Community Development Committees, two important committees which would benefit from a more inclusive approach to community participation.

It is also clear from the responses, that there is variance among and between stakeholder groups as to the level of participation experienced. This is also evident in the comments included by some respondents. This provides both a challenge and an opportunity

nationally. Examples of good practice developed in one area may apply equally well to another, acknowledging the local variances necessary to ensure that participation is specific to the community / Local Authority area concerned.

Recommendations

Structural Support - Dialogue

As noted above, the disparity between and among respondent groups presents both a challenge and an opportunity for PPNs and Local Authorities to discuss what is working well in some areas, or for some particular committees, and to develop best practice procedures in partnership. The mainly positive responses of the 'Local Authority Staff' respondents also present an opportunity to explore their approach to the principles and levels of engagement with their stakeholder colleagues to come to a common understanding. This could take place at a local or a national level, under national oversight of the National PPN Advisory Group and the Department of Rural and Community Development. This would also address the 'personality effect' that makes participation dependent on individuals among the stakeholder group, and support a more systemic approach.

Recommendation 1: A dialogue between the Local Authorities and the other PPN Stakeholders to establish practical, best-practice approaches to implementing the principles of participation and working towards increasing partnership across all stages of the decision-making process.

Structural Support – Policy

The data presented in this Report indicates that Local Authority Staff are both broadly in favour of participation generally and strongly of the view that the structures, as currently constituted, lead to a high level of partnership at all stages of the decision-making process. This is not, however, the view of the majority of Representatives. In addition to the dialogue referred to above, a review of participation within the Local Authority structures should be undertaken. This review would focus on whether these structures are really participative, following the Council of Europe's Framework. To support both this review, and the implementation of any actions that follow, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage should dedicate resources at, at least, Principal Officer grade to work collaboratively with counterparts in the Department of Rural and Community Development to ensure meaningful engagement.

Recommendation 2: Review the Local Authority Structures against the Council of Europe's Framework and dedicate resources from

within the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, of at least Principal Officer grade, to ensure meaningful engagement.

Further Research

This research sought to quantify how selected PPN stakeholders applied the principles of participation and the levels of participation across all stages of the decision-making process, in accordance with the Council of Europe Guidelines (Council of Europe, 2009) and the Report of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government (Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government, 2014). The disparities identified between and among stakeholder groups in their application of these instruments warrants further, qualitative, research with respondents to this survey indicating their willingness to engage in further conversation on this topic.

Recommendation 3: Further qualitative research to explore best practice solutions.

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Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

Please provide brief details of your Local Authority area and role in the PPN / Local Authority.

1. What Local Authority area are you / is your PPN in?

2. What is your role?

According to the Council of Europe, there are four main principles of participation - Participation; Trust; Accountability and Transparency; and Independence (definitions below). These 5 short questions seeks to clarify which of these principles are most evident in your participation network.

Participation: PPNs collect and channel the views of their membership. The input is critical to the policy-making process. Participation processes are open and accessible.

Trust: Honest interaction between PPN and Local Authority. Shared goal can only be reached if based on trust. Transparency, respect and mutual reliability are key tenets.

Accountability and Transparency: Acting in the public interest requires openness, responsibility, clarity and accountability.

Independence: PPNs are free and independent in respect of their aims, decisions and activities. They have the right to act independently and advocate different positions to those of the Local Authority

3. The Local Authority actively encourages participation by the PPN

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

4. The decision-making processes in the Local Authority are open and accessible

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

5. The relationship between the Local Authority and the PPN is based on transparency, respect and mutual reliability

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

6. The Local Authority and the PPN act openly, responsibly, clearly and accountably in their dealings with each other

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

7. The PPN can act independently of the Local Authority and advocate different positions to those of the Local Authority

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

The Council of Europe have identified 6 Steps in any decision-making process (details below). The next 6 short questions looks at participation levels for each step within your PPN. If it changes from time to time, please answer in respect of the highest level.

Agenda-Setting: Setting the agenda for the meeting / new year / 5 year term of office.

Drafting: Writing Local Authority policies and procedures, community development plans and other policy documents of relevance to the community.

Decision: The process of decision-making about a policy or procedure. Implementation: Putting policy into practice.

Monitoring: Monitoring and assessing the outcomes of the policy or procedure.

Reformulation: Using the information gathered in the monitoring step to evaluate and reformulate the policy or procedure.

8. When it comes to Agenda-Setting (Setting the agenda for the meeting / new year / 5 year term of office)...

- The LA decides or does everything and informs the PPN afterwards
- The LA requests inputs from the PPN on certain areas, selected by the LA
- The LA retains control of the process, but allows the PPN to suggest inputs
- The LA and PPN collaborate in all aspects of the process.

9. When it comes to Drafting (writing policies, communication plans etc.)...

- The LA decides or does everything and informs the PPN afterwards
- The LA requests inputs from the PPN on certain areas, selected by the LA
- The LA retains control of the process, but allows the PPN to suggest inputs
- The LA and PPN collaborate in all aspects of the process.

10. When it comes to Decision-making (the process of decision-making about a policy, initiative etc.)...

- The LA decides or does everything and informs the PPN afterwards
- The LA requests inputs from the PPN on certain areas, selected by the LA
- The LA retains control of the process, but allows the PPN to suggest inputs
- The LA and PPN collaborate in all aspects of the process.

11. When it comes to Implementation (putting policy into practice)...

- The LA decides or does everything and informs the PPN afterwards
- The LA requests inputs from the PPN on certain areas, selected by the LA
- The LA retains control of the process, but allows the PPN to suggest inputs
- The LA and PPN collaborate in all aspects of the process.

12. When it comes to Monitoring (monitoring and assessing outcomes of a policy or decision)...

- The LA decides or does everything and informs the PPN afterwards
- The LA requests inputs from the PPN on certain areas, selected by the LA
- The LA retains control of the process, but allows the PPN to suggest inputs
- The LA and PPN collaborate in all aspects of the process.

13. When it comes to Reformulation (using the information gathered through the Monitoring phase to evaluate and reformulate a policy or initiative)...

- The LA decides or does everything and informs the PPN afterwards
- The LA requests inputs from the PPN on certain areas, selected by the LA
- The LA retains control of the process, but allows the PPN to suggest inputs
- The LA and PPN collaborate in all aspects of the process.

This question asks about how the PPN Representatives get their mandate, i.e. know what issues are of concern to the PPN for discussion at their Committee / Board meetings.

14. From where do the PPN Representatives get their mandate? (answer all that apply)

- From a Linkage Group
- From a Thematic Network
- From the PPN Plenary
- From the Vision for Community Wellbeing
- From their own experience
- From the PPN Secretariat
- Other (please specify)

Do you have any further comments or observations to make about how participation is operating in your PPN? Would you be open to having a more in-depth discussion should the research require it?

15. Any comments / observations about how participation operates in your PPN?

16. Would you be open to having a more in-depth discussion should the research require it? If so, please provide your contact details below.

Name

PPN / Local Authority

Role

Email Address

Phone Number

Social Justice Ireland is an independent think-tank and justice advocacy organisation of that advances the lives of people and communities through providing independent social analysis and effective policy development to create a sustainable future for every member of society and for societies as a whole.



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