



Submission to Public Libraries Strategy 218-2022

Draft Outline

By

County Wicklow Public Participation Network

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Introducing County Wicklow Public Participation Network

County Wicklow Public Participation Network (PPN) was established in July 2014 under the directive of the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government and in accordance with legislation in the Local Government Reform Act 2014 (Section 46). Public Participation Networks were established to be an independent structure that would become the main link through which local authorities connect with the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in a process to facilitate communities to articulate a diverse range of views and interests within the local government system. Co Wicklow PPN has 165 diverse member groups including sports groups, women's groups, older people's groups, tidy towns, LGBT groups, Travellers groups, community councils, resident's associations, youth groups and more. Member groups span the 5 Municipal Areas of Co Wicklow and the 3 PPN colleges which are Social Inclusion, Community & Voluntary and Environment. Some of these groups are networks in their own right.

PPN representatives serve as a voice for the community on structures including: the Local Community Development Committee; Housing & Corporate Estate Strategic Policy Committee; Planning & Development Strategic Policy Committee; Transport, Water & Environment Strategic Policy Committee; Community, Cultural & Social Development Strategic Policy Committee; Economic Development & Enterprise Strategic Policy Committee; Wicklow County Childcare Committee; Co Wicklow Children & Young People's Services Committee; Co Wicklow Local Sports Partnership; Wicklow County Tourism Board; Co Wicklow Volunteer Centre and Co Wicklow Joint Policing Committee.

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

Purpose

An invitation was issued by the Libraries Development Unit of the Dept. Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government to participate in the early consultation on the Draft Outline of the Public Libraries Strategy 2018-2022

This submission is based on the opinion of the Co Wicklow PPN Secretariat and Representatives. Co Wicklow PPN also promoted this consultation through its July (member) Update E-bulletin and by its Facebook Page

Preamble

Libraries are an important resource in communities and Co Wicklow PPN welcomes the opportunity to feed into the Public Libraries Strategy, we are also pleased that the deadline for responses was extended from 2 weeks to 4 weeks. However, we would like to point out the challenges to preparing this submission in the hope that they will be taken into consideration for future consultations.

- For Co Wicklow PPN to consult all member groups time is needed to send out information to the group contact, allow them time to meet, consult with the members of their group and feed back to us prior to our collating a collaborative response. Even if member groups agree to make their own submission they need time to facilitate meetings and compile a response.
- It is extremely difficult to participate in consultations during the summer months and this response has been adversely impacted by the holiday period
- National and Local Government appear to run the majority of consultations during the summer months. The Co Wicklow PPN July Update E-bulletin contained 9 invitations for

public consultations most with tight deadlines with the latest being 4th September. Following this we were alerted to another consultation on housing. As mentioned above summer time is not conducive to qualitative consultation and a vast number at the same time promotes consultation fatigue and can prevent engagement.

Thematic Programmes

Co Wicklow PPN agrees that while the themes are broad, the 3 thematic programmes of Community Development, Literacy & Learning and Books/Reading & the Life of the Imagination are important services and the priority programmes identified under each theme are relevant. We would include the following observations:

Community Development –

Developing the library as a community space will promote the use of libraries and the services they provide. Community events should be encouraged to run in libraries where there is capacity to do so. An example of this is the recent use of the Arklow Library in hosting the Presentation of the Arklow Municipal District Community Awards. If community groups were permitted to use the local library for their meetings this could have a beneficial impact on raising the profile of the group while supporting groups in their work as well as raising the profile and encouraging use of the library

Likewise, where possible and appropriate, community services should be outreached to local libraries for mutual benefit. For example, employment services, business services, advice clinics etc.

There are a number of government initiatives which could be run from the library where appropriate. The smoking cessation project would be a prime example of one.

Literacy & Learning –

As more people participate in education it is important that the local library becomes known and is used as a support. Particularly as the costs of learning can be a burden for many families. As accreditation becomes a condition in jobs, particularly in childcare and eldercare, many people who are currently working in these fields and have low educational attainment now find themselves having to participate in structured learning and course work. These people often need encouragement and support and the local library should provide (and be promoted as) a safe and supportive space for them.

In addition many households in Co Wicklow do not have access to decent and consistent broadband and printing facilities. Access to the library facilities enable learners to participate fully in educational courses. Facilities that are provided at flexible times (that is outside business hours) are extremely important

Books/Reading & the Life of the Imagination –

Books have always played a pivotal part in individual and community development and even in the current digital age they should remain an integral and appreciated part of our society. However, if libraries are to remain a current resource for learning and development it is important that all media and materials are available and encouraged for use.

As reading forms part of the arts it would make sense for the library to promote local art where possible. Local community arts groups and historical societies should be encouraged to work with the library on projects that promote cultural awareness. Local authors should be promoted and encouraged through book launches at their local library.

Strong and mutually supportive linkages should be made between local pre-schools, schools, further education & training centres, and colleges. Along with local voluntary groups to ensure books that reflect their needs are available

Book clubs attached to the library provide a much-needed civic space for engagement that is free and neutral, with no commercial motivation. This is a very important aspect of public life that is enjoyed by a few but could easily be promoted further. These groups could be supported through the provision of a private room for monthly meetings and on-line fora for participants to contribute remotely if unable to attend.

Co Wicklow PPN would also recommend Inclusion & Diversity as a theme

Inclusion & Diversity –

Libraries should recognise & facilitate the need to address inequality in all forms through providing easy access to library buildings, books in other formats (large text, audio), books that recognise and show diverse family types, people of different ethnicity, people with disability. Consider providing an even quieter space in libraries for people with autism. Could libraries incorporate sensory spaces? This would also be of great benefit for those with autism.

General Observations –

The library, like a post office, can be a fundamental community service. For this to happen the library and all its services must be accessible to all. This includes being open as much as possible and at varying times through the day and the working week.

Libraries must promote their services and activities so that the community is aware of the diverse supports available to them. Further, libraries should build strong links with the community and increase the relevance of its services by hosting talks, exhibitions, story mornings for toddlers, outreach to the hard to reach communities, invite schools for visits, give brief talks in schools, and consider developing a lending toys & games service. Libraries might also consider outreach visits to nursing homes facilitated by volunteers.

Co Wicklow PPN hopes that the observations and suggestions in this submission are useful albeit brief. We respectfully request that in the future time will be allowed for more focused, dedicated and worthwhile consultation and feedback when seeking submissions for plans that impact on Co Wicklow communities.