



**Submission to the Public Consultation on  
Wicklow County Council Draft Strategic Policy Committee Scheme  
2019-2024**

**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 290 diverse member groups, 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, County Wicklow Partnership, and Co Wicklow Joint Policing Committee. PPN Representatives strive to ensure that the needs of the community sector are prioritised within local policy processes.

## **Draft Strategic Policy Committee Scheme 2019-2024**

### **Appendix 1 – SPC Framework configuration**

Co Wicklow PPN acknowledges that the configuration of the SPCs covers all the Wicklow County Council services and will therefore provide focused support and advice to the council in regards to policy and practice in these specific areas. We particularly welcome the new Climate & Biodiversity Action SPC and commend WCC in ensuring that the voice of young people is heard through the Wicklow Comhairle. It is important that a young person takes this seat if possible and not an adult representative of the organisation. We also welcome the West Wicklow seat on this SPC, which is important given the different strengths and challenges of this predominantly rural part of the county.

Climate, Biodiversity and Sustainability is a huge issue that affects all of society on many diverse levels. We would recommend that WCC ensure that this issue is considered across all the SPCs including the Housing SPC and the Community SPC. This could be done by adding an environmental seat to these SPCs or by having this issue as a standard Agenda item for the Corporate Policy Group. The appointment of the proposed new Climate Action Officer should also support this course of action with the ultimate aim of developing sustainability for the county and all its citizens.

## **Appendix 2 – SPC Meetings & Procedures**

Co Wicklow PPN recognises the importance of each SPC having a focused Annual Workplan. We believe that all members of the SPC, including those from the external sectors should have an opportunity to use their areas of local knowledge and expertise to shape the Workplan and there should be clear procedures and protocol for them to do so. The Workplan should be available on the Wicklow County Council's website with updates and evidence of outcomes.

As all SPC members are representative of their nominating group/organisation it is important that they have the opportunity to consult with their nominating body ahead of SPC meetings and be able to report back to them in a timely fashion. To facilitate this the SPC Agenda should be circulated at least four weeks in advance of the meeting. This is particularly important for PPN representatives on SPCs as they are there to represent the PPN as a whole and it is important that they have the opportunity to consult with their Linkage Group/Thematic Network ahead of SPC meetings. SPCs usually meet on a quarterly basis and as such a considerable period of time will pass until the minutes of the meeting are approved for circulation, an agreed brief report should be made available for members to circulate to their nominated groups/organisations within 1-2 weeks of the meeting taking place (This is also a recommendation which is coming through nationally in the National PPN Annual Report). Correspondence should be available by email so as to facilitate sharing of information and reduce paper usage and postage costs.

Training in relation to SPCs should be made available equally to all members of the SPC including external members. This will promote mutual understanding, better relationships, and a stronger SPC body which will lead to good decision making, better policies and greater benefits for the county.

Co Wicklow PPN and its Representatives agree to work in accordance with our Co Wicklow PPN Representatives Charter, which sets out the role and responsibilities of the PPN's Representatives. The Charter underpins the mutual respect and expected behaviours of all PPN Stakeholders. We are including a copy of the Co Wicklow PPN Representatives Charter for your consideration. We hope that WCC and all its committees will recognise and operate in the ethos of this Representatives Charter.

As stated, Co Wicklow PPN is a network of community and voluntary groups. The majority of these groups are volunteer run and led. Co Wicklow PPN seeks representatives from these groups to fill community & voluntary, environmental and social inclusion seats on the WCC SPCs. Many of these volunteers are employed during the day. There is no financial cover for them in missing work and it is unfair to expect them to lose their income or interfere with their holiday allowances. As such we would like WCC to consider holding some, if not all SPC meetings outside of normal working hours to accommodate volunteers and show them that their time is valued.

### **Appendix 3 – Principles applying in relation to the appointment of Members/Sector Representatives**

Co Wicklow PPN nominates representatives in accordance with our Constitution. The term of a PPN Representative is 3 years with the opportunity of sitting for a second term. Our Constitution is available to download from our website

### **Appendix 4 – Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015**

Co Wicklow PPN is registered with the lobbying authority and submits quarterly returns

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Co Wicklow PPN has circulated the WCC Draft SPC scheme to all our member groups encouraging them to engage with this process and some groups have indicated their intention to do so. This submission was drafted, circulated to all members and includes the feedback submitted by our deadline.

We hope that WCC finds this submission useful, that it considers the suggestions put forward carefully and that the majority if not all of the suggestions are implemented in the new SPC scheme. We look forward to hearing from you in this regard.