

# **Wicklow PPN**

## **Strategic Plan 2024-2029**

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## Introduction

The Wicklow County Public Participation Network was established under the Local Government Reform Act (2014) as a voluntary organisation, made up of and directed by its member groups which are active in community and voluntary, social inclusion, and environmental activities all around the County. It's role is to enable these member groups to input into and have their voices heard within the formal decision-making structures of County Council. It's activities are based in 3 main areas;

- feeding in the community voices to the County Council (and other bodies) via representatives elected to committees and boards, in consultation submissions, through dialogue and networking with agencies, around policy development and decision-making that affects the community, etc.,
- providing a mechanism for two-way information flows between the County Council and PPN member groups, and between member groups, and other organisations, including with other PPNs across the country,
- supporting PPN member groups to improve their own capacity and ability to achieve their objectives in a variety of ways including training, resources, networking and information.

## Purpose of this plan

This Strategic Plan was developed during 2023 through a participative process involving the PPN member groups and other stakeholders. This process was guided by a Sub-group of the PPN's Secretariat; Emma Smith, Carina Holmes and Phyllis Farrell, supported by the PPN staff. It's completion was a requirement of the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), which oversees the administration of the PPNs around the Country, and is intended to support good governance and efficient administration<sup>1</sup>.

The Strategic Plan is intended support the PPN to function as well as it can, becoming increasingly effective and efficient in fulfilling its purpose, and also in promoting progress towards the member groups' agreed Vision for Community Wellbeing in County Wicklow.

## Practical benefits

Having a Strategic Plan benefits the PPN in a number of ways.

- It gives all the PPN member groups an opportunity to agree a clear plan for the coming 5-year period to work towards their Vision. It is important for consistent operation in line with the wishes of member groups that the PPN has a clear Vision, a Strategic Plan for working towards goals in the next 5 years that support this Vision, and - each year - a Workplan that articulates the specific actions to be taken. These documents,

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<sup>1</sup> The PPN wishes to note that production of a multi-annual Strategic Plan, as requested by DRCD, is at odds with the continuing annual funding model for PPNs, which does not support a forward planning approach.

developed and agreed by the PPN members, are vital to guide the PPN's work as agreed, and reflect the PPN principles of participation, inclusivity, accountability, transparency and independence.

- It helps streamline the task of developing the annual Workplan as all actions need to support achievement of the Strategic plan.
- It provides a measure of the PPN's performance; one where the PPN determines the reasonable and realistic measures to be applied, allowing for the constraints and circumstances within which the PPN operates.

The Strategic Plan is not intended to be overly lengthy or complex, but to set out simply and describe the PPN's goals for the coming 5 years, providing ways to assess the success of the PPN in achieving these.

## **Constraints**

The PPN is currently funded to provide 2 staff members that support its work and has a small budget of around €20,000.00 each year that support its work, which has grown enormously since it was established.

In reality, these staff are over-stretched to deliver the core workload and there is no capacity to support an increase in the activities of the PPN without additional resources. This is a significant limitation on the ambitions that can realistically be contained in the Strategic Plan or associated Annual Workplans and is a major restriction on the potential of the PPN, and subsequently its member groups. The PPN wish to note that this Strategic Plan has been developed in light of present constraints and does not reflect what the PPN could, and would like, to achieve in different circumstances.

## **Process**

The process to generate this Strategic Plan included the following steps:

- An online survey - which was sent to all stakeholders (all PPN member groups, the PPN host organisation, and Local Authority staff and elected members), and included
  - A review of respondents involvement with the PPN
  - A look back at how successfully respondents felt the PPN has operated in relation to the main elements of its remit
  - A SWOT analysis allowed where respondents identified the strengths and opportunities that could be built on, as well as the weaknesses and threats that need to be considered in planning for the future.
- A workshop – held in Brockagh Resource Centre, Glendalough, with Secretariat members and Representatives, where the information gathered in the look back and the SWOT analysis was discussed and the outline contents of a Draft Strategic Plan were developed.
- Review of the draft Strategic Plan – was carried out by those that participated in the workshop, before being referred back to the Sub-group for further work, and then submitted to the Secretariat for checking.

- Final adoption of Strategic Plan – the revised Draft Strategic Plan was circulated to all PPN member groups and groups and discussed and adopted at the Plenary of <date>.

### Survey feedback

A copy of this survey can be seen in Appendix A. Over 13% of member groups responded, and responses were obtained from Secretariat members and Representatives. The host organisation, a limited number of County Council staff, and 1 elected member also returned the completed survey.

Overall feedback to the survey was extremely positive<sup>2</sup>. It was apparent that the PPN there was a good variety of PPN experience, with respondents reporting involvement with the PPN of between 1 and 5 years, and taking up roles as representatives and on the Secretariat. While most respondents felt they had a good understanding of the PPN, there was less confidence that this understanding extended to the membership of their organisations. Reassuringly a strong majority felt that Wicklow PPN focuses on work in the key areas of its remit and is good or excellent at these, namely:

- Representation
- Information/ communications
- Support of member groups
- Governance

While there was considerable ambition across all areas of work that the PPN could and ideally should be taking on, respondents indicated a clear awareness that capacity to deliver on this ambition is not available within current resources.

Three big challenges were identified as facing the PPN, made more difficult as they are outside the control of the PPN itself. These are

- The poor public awareness of PPN & its role, despite an apparent campaign to address this by DRCD (No member groups reported seeing any material relating to this campaign in any media format.)
- The lack of ability to have impact in decision-making. This reflects shortcomings of the SPC structures (themselves with little opportunity to influence policy), poor ability to influence national policy and programmes, little – if any – evidence of impact from submissions made, or representation work, and limited openness to the role of the PPN within the wider culture of state and semi-state agencies.
- The total inadequacy of resources & conditions in both staffing levels and operational budget, & lack of support to deliver task set.

It is not within the gift of the PPN to change these circumstances, although we continue our best efforts to raise awareness County Wicklow of the PPN's work. However, it is considered important to highlight the widespread recognition of these issues in the survey as a major impediment to the PPN realising its potential, and supporting it's member groups to do likewise.

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<sup>2</sup> A copy of the Strategic Plan Survey Responses Summary can be found at <XXXX>

## DRAFT Strategic Goals, Objectives, Key Actions and Key Performance Indicators

### Goal 1: Representation

*“The PPN delivers effective representation for the community and voluntary sector in County Wicklow.”*

Our specific representation objectives are as follow.

OBJECTIVES		Key Performance Indicators
1.1	The PPN actively seeks the membership and active participation of all community and voluntary sector groups in County Wicklow.	<i>Increased number of member groups &amp; participation in engagements</i>
1.2	The PPN can demonstrate that it consults widely and that its representations reflect the wishes of member groups.	<i>Engagement outputs are accessible and correspond to representations made</i>
1.3	The PPN responds fully and in a timely manner to all consultations where its input is sought, and seeks to input wherever it identifies that this is appropriate.	<i>Record of all submissions sought, submitted &amp; additional inputs made.</i>
1.4	The PPN is recognised and supported by <u>both</u> the communities of County Wicklow and by State and semi-State bodies as the representative voice for the community and voluntary sector in the County.	<i>PPN representatives are invited to participate in all structures that impact on the community and voluntary sector in Co. Wicklow</i>
1.5	The PPN builds strong collaborative partnerships and undertakes joint initiatives where these help deliver PPN objectives.	<i>Record of joint actions</i>
1.6	The PPN has real influence through its representatives, submissions and engagements, to achieve the changes sought by our communities.	<i>Record of matters raised/ addressed and ultimate outcomes</i>
1.7	The Wicklow PPN collaborates efficiently with other PPNs to present agreed positions of the community and voluntary sector nationally.	<i>Submissions on nationally agreed positions.</i>

1.8	The roles played by representatives are valued by the PPN membership and the committees and boards on which they sit where they have equality of participation with other members.	<i>Where vacancies arise for representative positions, these positions are sought-after and elections contested. There are no long-term/ enduring vacancies</i>
1.9	The PPN supports member groups to improve their capacity for active citizenship, It encourages members from <u>all</u> its groups to take up the role of representative, and it seeks to provide supports to enable all those elected to carry out the role successfully.	<i>Representatives reflect the diversity found in the community and voluntary sector in Co. Wicklow</i>
1.10	Representatives are committed, well trained and supported to be optimally effective, and fulfil their roles conscientiously.	<i>There is regular training for and required reporting by representatives. Additional supports are provided as needed</i>

## GOAL 2: Member Support

*“The PPN provides member groups with supports tailored to increasing their capacity and ability to achieve positive results for their communities.”*

Our specific objectives for member support are as follow.

OBJECTIVES	Key Performance Indicators
2.1. The PPN has a full and up-to-date understanding of Member Groups’ challenges and support needs and those of the community and voluntary sector in general.	Regular, comprehensive feedback from all member groups on their needs.
2.2. The PPN is recognised and widely used as <u>the</u> source (direct and indirect) amongst community and voluntary groups in Wicklow for information on, and access to, affordable training and support measures that meet Member Groups’ needs.	Directory of training delivered or sourced elsewhere reflecting member groups’ needs. Receipt of positive evaluations on training.
2.3. The PPN secures increased staff capacity and resources to enhance services provided to member groups and enable it to fulfil its remit; representing the community and voluntary sector in the County, ensuring the sector is kept fully informed and others are made aware of the activities within the sector, and enhancing the abilities of member groups to fulfil their objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased staff salaries</li><li>• Increased staff levels</li><li>• Increased funding</li><li>• Enhanced staff skills/ training</li></ul>
2.4. The PPN provides funding application supports to member groups to enable them to pursue relevant funding opportunities for their activities.	Increasing range of supports made available.
2.5. The PPN facilitates networks or groupings reflecting shared interest amongst member groups and supports the activities that these groups agree to undertake.	Networks established & functioning well.
2.6. The PPN brings member groups together regularly around the County in a variety of ways to develop relationships and strengthen their working together as a Network, enhancing how groups operate individually and together. These gatherings may be focused on specific events and activities, or be social and celebratory. All gatherings involve opportunities for networking and social interaction.	List of PPN events held (for all members or subsets of member groups)



### GOAL 3: Communications

*“The PPN maintains consistently excellent communications. It gathers and disseminates relevant information to all member groups, supports internal networking by member groups, representatives and secretariat members, and successfully promotes the role of the PPN and the work of its members.”*

Our specific communication objectives are as follows.

OBJECTIVES	Key Performance Indicators
3.1. The PPN maintains an excellent online and social media presence, providing regular valuable information to our member groups, and to disseminate information about and promote the activities of our member groups. It continues to develop and enhance its media activities to support PPN activities and achieve maximum impact.	Up-to-date & regular newsletters & postings on Fb
3.2. The PPN links effectively with other networks and communication platforms to ensure information of value is shared as widely as possible most importantly within the community and voluntary sector but also amongst State and other organisations that have an interest in or work with communities.	Increased reach/ readership of PPN communications
3.3. The PPN seeks measures to address the very low public awareness of PPNs both in County Wicklow and across the Country. Wherever possible, the PPN will participate in activities and initiatives that provide the opportunity to introduce the PPN to more people and groups in communities throughout the County.	Networked dissemination of PPN communications

## GOAL 4: Governance/ Operations

*“The PPN is fully compliant with all governance requirements and demonstrates best practice in its operations.”*

Our specific governance objectives are as follows.

OBJECTIVES	Key Performance Indicators
4.1. The PPN ensures good and fair staff employment terms and conditions.	Successful staff appraisals
4.2. The PPN achieves multi-annual funding to enable it to carry out its proper functions fully, to plan for the future, be strategic, and work efficiently.	
4.3. The PPN is fully compliant with all governance requirements and has systems in place to ensure it is aware of changes to requirements and that updates are made when needed.	Funding submission & response
4.4. All PPN policies and procedures are checked regularly to ensure that they are fit for purpose, easily accessible and understandable, and that they are updated or supplemented as appropriate to ensure the smooth and successful operation of the PPN..	Current list of governance requirements & compliance checklist
4.5. The PPN ensures that all internal operations are documented, institutional learning is captured, and there is active future planning in place to ensure the PPN can operate fully and effectively in the event of staff turnover and other contingencies.	Up-to-date catalogued library of PPN materials and internal operations. Contingency plans in place
4.6. The PPN is clear and succinct about it’s purpose and operation. It communicates this through brief, easy-to-understand, and widely available resources that explain the PPN structure and how it works, and through the increasing fluency and confidence of members to describe to others what the PPN is and what it does. This helps potential and existing member groups to become quickly familiar and learn their way around the PPN and its activities, and to participate fully.	Effective, short, resources explaining the PPN.

## Appendix I: Suggested Specific Actions related to Strategic Goals and Objectives

The following actions were mentioned in the workshop and online survey as possible actions that could be considered to help deliver PPN objectives. They were captured and included here to assist in development of future annual PPN Workplans that will build towards the strategic goals and objectives identified in this plan.

### Goal 1: Representation

*“The PPN delivers effective representation for the community and voluntary sector in County Wicklow.”*

Relevant OBJECTIVES	KEY ACTIONS	Key Performance Indicators (for actions)	Yr/Q
1.10	Ensure rolling induction and training programme, shared with neighbouring PPNs if appropriate, so that representatives receive this as soon as possible after taking up their role and understand and are equipped for it.	All representatives receive induction training within 4 months of election.	2-5
1.10	<p>Provide a suite of supports for representatives enhance the capacity &amp; performance of representatives, such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentoring “buddy” system &amp; early recruitment for reps/ succession</li> <li>• Great induction &amp; follow-on training (see 1.1.i above) including introduction to Vision for Community Wellbeing and Digest of this.</li> <li>• Develop/ access an organogram that details the structure and functions of the Local Authority</li> <li>• Networking of all representatives allows identification of common challenges and responses to these, co-ordinated action, issues to be brought back to the PPN to be raised under 1.3 below.</li> <li>• Ensure Reps know the Wicklow PPN Vision for Community Wellbeing and are speaking for the whole membership</li> <li>• Linkage groups and Thematic networks to work with reps &amp; help with 2-way flow of information.</li> </ul>	<p>Mentoring system operating</p> <p>LA organogram</p> <p>Active reps network for each structure with &gt;1 PPN rep.</p> <p>Reps training/ workshop on Wellbeing Vision</p> <p>Functioning Linkage &amp; Thematic Groups</p>	Various

1.8 & 1.10	Seek access to training provided to elected representatives on the function of Local Authorities and their committees	Places on courses available	1 (ongoing)
1.7	Network nationally to collaborate on representation, requesting changes & developing a national community voice	Participation on national PPN representatives network	2-5
1.8 & 1.9	Representatives are surveyed regularly about the challenges they face to participate and this information is used to pursue changes on the Committee or Boards on which they sit, or in terms of PPN supports, as appropriate.	Representatives attending over 75% of meetings	1-5
1.10	Representatives on structures network with one another & also organise efficient submission of a single report for each meeting to staff for dissemination, including flagging items of interest and noting their contributions and impacts (or lack of).	Over 90% of meeting reports submitted	1-5
1.6, 1.8 & 1.10	Use meeting reports to compile short annual report of representatives' engagement, contributions and impact. Include a short assessment score-card type checklist for each committee & propose national PPN criteria for this so that it can be used as basis for case made in submission on SPCs, etc..	Annual summary of representatives' activity & committee operation.	1-5
1.4 & 1.8	Representatives participation is actively accommodated by the structures on which they sit. Informed by 1.2.i above each committee is requested to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hold meetings at times that take account of participation by volunteers</li> <li>• share the chair/ vice chair positions between statutory &amp; voluntary sector</li> <li>• facilitate remote participation for those unable to travel</li> <li>• etc.</li> </ul>	Operational adjustments made by committees to accommodate volunteer members	1-5
1.8	Obtain clarity on the roles of all members of committees & ensure all reps to be treated equally (elected or volunteers/ PPN)	Confirmation from DHPLG	1
1.5	Increased networking with Local Authority staff and elected members, and other organisations relevant or aligned to PPN member groups' interests	Regular meetings with collaborative partners to support networking.	1-5

1.8	Receipt of agenda and materials well in advance of meetings to allow for internal consultation/ reps networking,	Timely receipt of agendas	1-5
1.8	Feed in shortcomings of SPCs to national review process and engage proactively with the Local Authority and Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government on challenges for PPNs to fulfil their representative role.	Submissions	As required

## GOAL 2: Member Support

*“The PPN provides member groups with supports tailored to increasing their capacity and ability to achieve positive results for their communities.”*

Relevant OBJECTIVES	KEY ACTIONS	Key Performance Indicators (for actions)	Yr/Q
2.1	Undertake annual comprehensive survey of member needs and record of how these change over time.	Completed annual surveys, collated & matched to training/ supports offered (directly or indirectly)	1-5
2.2	Provide annual training programme informed by annual survey of member needs and including training accessible from other providers. Seek feedback in order to ensure continued improvement & relevance of courses provided. Training that becomes available, especially from other providers, should be notified to member groups in a timely manner, a record of this kept, so that potential future providers are known.  (Include training received by Local Elected Members if accessible, especially if available online/ recorded.)	Lists of training & supports provided (see 2.1 above) and evaluative feedback received.	1-5

2.3	Join with other PPNs in seeking improved conditions for existing staff, additional staff capacity and enhanced programme budget. Identify/ list work that cannot be undertaken due to capacity constraints. Identify alternative funding sources and evaluate whether to pursue these.	Increased funding to enable increased programme activity.	1-5
2.4	As appropriate within available resources use peer support, sample applications, training workshops, etc. to support member groups' search for funding. Ultimately, seek to secure staff resources to provide support to member groups.	Expanding list of resources provided by PPN to support member group fundraising.	1-5
2.5	Where community groups have a common or shared interest, support initiatives to network these to increase benefits from shared experience, collaboration, and support.	Networks established & functioning	1-5

### GOAL 3: Communications

*“The PPN maintains consistently excellent communications. It gathers and disseminates relevant information to all member groups, supports internal networking by member groups, representatives and secretariat members, and successfully promotes the role of the PPN and the work of its members.”*

Relevant OBJECTIVES	KEY ACTIONS	Key Performance Indicators (for actions)	Yr/Q
3.1	Allocate sufficient staff time for media and online communication work and regularly assess impact of all communication platforms used.	Up-to-date & regular newsletters & social posts	1-5
3.1	Explore other social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, etc.) to reach other sectors of the community efficiently, using targeted messages/ reels, etc. Investigate potential for an intern to manage this.	Presence on extended range of media	1 Q3-5
3.2	Diversify the reach of PPN communications using other existing networks such as the Ukrainian Committee.	Networked dissemination of PPN communications	1-5

3.1 & 3.3	Make use of radio; local notices and diaries, links to events, fundraising opportunities, etc.	Radio coverage	1-5
3.3	Seek use of resources from DRCD awareness-raising campaign which did not “land” in Wicklow, and additional funding to use local media to increase public awareness of the PPN and its role.	Access to additional resources	1
3.3	Continue to hold regular municipal district meetings with member groups that are open to the wider community.	Municipal District meetings (well publicised)	1-5

#### **GOAL 4: Governance/ Operations**

*“The PPN is fully compliant with all governance requirements and demonstrates best practice in its operations.”*

Relevant OBJECTIVES	KEY ACTIONS	Key Performance Indicators (for actions)	Yr/Q
4.1	Support national efforts to address present seriously inadequate terms & conditions for staff. Seek ways in which the PPN can ring-fence staff time & protect staff health & wellbeing at work.	Aligned and consistent PPN staff T&Cs. Regular staff supervision & support and appraisals.	1-5
4.1	Look at ways the PPN can develop structural supports for staff & tap into resources and support of relevant County Council staff	As above	1-5
4.2	Seek commitment to 5-year funding cycle from DRCD for the PPN (liaising with all other PPNs) to enable proper future planning of PPN activities and delivery of Strategic Plan.	Funding submission & response	1-5
4.3	Compile full list of governance requirements. Conduct review of PPN governance compliance, identify any areas for further work & develop a programme of work to address these.	Current list of governance requirements & compliance checklist	1-5
4.3 & 4.4	Create a catalogued library of all governance material, agreements and documentation relating to PPN operation, with scheduled annual	Up-to-date catalogued library of PPN materials	1-5

	reviews & revision to be kept up-to-date. Structure material to illustrate its nature (i.e. directional – Wellbeing Vision, Strategic Plan, Workplans, policy agreements, SDGs, and operational – Handbook, Code of Conduct, Financial policy, etc.)		
4.5	<p>Draw up a contingency plans, particularly providing for situations of staff vacancy &amp; turnover, that ensure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• continued operation of the PPN is possible</li> <li>• institutional knowledge is captured &amp; available in optimal format to be picked up by new staff</li> <li>• provision is made for succession planning with staff, Secretariat, representatives, etc.</li> </ul>	Contingency plans in place	1-2
4.5 & 4.6	Produce a diagram(s) showing both how the PPN works and how it feeds into Local Government and elsewhere. Develop simple quick 2 minute max. “elevator pitch” to explain the PPN.	Organogram/ diagram	1-2
4.6 & 2.6	Host events to encourage people to meet & share.	Regular events held	1-5