



Submission: Draft Strategic Policy Committee Scheme

Date:	August 2024
Contact for this submission:	Coordinator, Kilkenny PPN ppnkilkenny@kilkennycoco.ie
Contributions:	Secretariat and PPN members
Context:	<p>Setup as a result of Local Government reform in 2014, Kilkenny Public Participation Network (PPN) is an independent network of Community, Environment and Social Inclusion organisations, working to build a better county for the community of Kilkenny. The PPN is managed by voluntary Secretariat which reports to PPN members through the Plenary.</p> <p>Kilkenny PPN has 446 member and associate member organisations. These members are based across County Kilkenny. The PPN is the prescribed body to nominate Community, Environment and Social Inclusion representation onto various Council Structures, including SPCs</p>

Introduction

Kilkenny PPN welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the new Strategic Policy Scheme.

Kilkenny PPN is committed to providing high quality community, voluntary, social inclusion and environmental representation on Kilkenny County Council Strategic Policy Committees. The PPN is committed to providing on-going support to PPN

Representatives who sit on Kilkenny County Council Structures. This includes on-going training, the servicing and development of PPN Linkage Groups, policy development, and so on.

Kilkenny PPN has circulated the Kilkenny County Council SPC Scheme to all our groups encouraging them to engage with the process. This submission was drafted, circulated to all members and includes the feedback submitted by member groups, the Secretariat and PPN Representatives.

We hope that Kilkenny County Council finds this submission useful, that it considers 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.

Item	Issue/background	Core Responsibility	PPN Recommended Actions for consideration
Seats and representation on SPCs	<p>The number of elected councillors (and sectoral interests) on SPCs have been reduced significantly in County Kilkenny compared to the other Counties in Ireland where the number of elected councillors (and sectoral interests) have remained more or less the same or have been increased. This proposed development in County Kilkenny reduces the diversity of voices involved in local policy & decision making. We note that the number of councillors on SPCs in Kilkenny have been reduced from 36 to 27</p> <p>PPN's are statutory bodies born out of the Local Government Reform Act in 2014 with the aim to increase public participation and engagement in local policy and decision making.</p> <p>PPN Representatives strive to ensure that the needs of the community section are prioritised within local policy processes</p> <p>KPPN represents almost 450 Community & Voluntary, Social Inclusion and Environmental groups within Kilkenny City and County, with its membership continuing to grow monthly. With a</p>	Elected members and Corporate Service	<p>We recommend keeping the larger number of members (elected councillors and sectoral interests) in each SPC so as to ensure that the community engagement through the PPN can be effective.</p> <p>Given the broad scope of SPC1, it is essential that Kilkenny PPN's representation is maintained, not reduced. Representatives from the Community & Voluntary and Social Inclusion pillars are necessary to ensure comprehensive and inclusive policy development.</p> <p>Given the importance of SPC2, it is essential that Kilkenny PPN's representation is maintained, not reduced. Representatives from the Community & Voluntary and Environmental pillars are necessary to ensure comprehensive and inclusive policy development.</p> <p>Given the current political landscape and the growing concerns of sustainability and climate action, it is increasingly important that Social Inclusion and Environmental considerations be integral to local policy-making. Therefore, at least one representative from each of the three PPN Electoral Colleges - Community &</p>

	<p>conservative average of 50 members per community organisation/group, KPPN currently represents at least 22,500 individuals, the majority of whom are registered under the Community&Voluntary Sector.</p> <p>One of the National government's important Strategic objectives is to engage marginalised communities and their representative bodies in local policy, planning and decision-making processes to ensure inclusivity and that no one is left behind. This objective aligns with the principles of participatory democracy and the empowerment of communities at the grassroots level.</p> <p>The proposed draft scheme for the Local Authorities Strategic Policy Committees 2024-2029 indicates a reduction in Kilkenny PPN's representation by 30%, from 13 seats in the previous SPC scheme (2019-2024) to 9 seats in the proposed SPC scheme.</p> <p>This reduction impacts various sectors as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Community & Voluntary and Social Inclusion pillars are no longer represented on SPC1. • The Community & Voluntary and Environmental pillars are no longer represented on SPC2. <p>In addition to this, the proposed SPC scheme lacks any representation from the Social Inclusion pillar on SPC4 and representation from the Environmental pillar on SPC5.</p>		<p>Voluntary, Social Inclusion, and Environment - should be allocated to each SPC to ensure balanced and informed decision-making.</p> <p>In the Council's draft (Point 3.3) it says "<i>each SPC is required to consider climate action and climate impacts as part of any and all policies that form part of its work programme</i>". With no environmental representative on some SPCs it's difficult to see how this can be achieved. It would seem particularly important for Transport (SPC2).</p> <p>We would recommend to have a second representation from the PPN Environment/Conservation pillar on SPC 4 Climate Action as this SPC is intended to advocate environmental progress.</p> <p>The positions for Sectoral Representation are vital for the inclusion of the community voice and expertise voices on the SPCs. Where seats for Sectoral Representatives cannot be filled, the seats should remain unfilled until a Representative is available. It is imperative that positions for Sectoral Representatives are not removed or reassigned if they are not able to be filled. The option for inclusion of these Representatives must always remain.</p> <p><u>In summary:</u> Kilkenny PPN recommend increasing the number of elected councillors on each SPC and is seeking additional representation as follows:</p> <p>SPC 1: Community & Voluntary Representation and Social Inclusion Representation</p> <p>SPC 2: Community & Voluntary Representation and Environment/Conservation Representation</p> <p>SPC 4: Social Inclusion Representation and Environmental/Conservation Representation</p> <p>SPC 5: Environment/Conservation Representation</p>
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Annual Workplan	In order to give clear direction to representatives on their committee role, what is to be achieved and how success of the committee is measured there needs to be a focused workplan for the term of the SPC containing strategic goals and objectives	Committee Chair and AO	<p>An agreed set term workplan to be devised for each committee setting out core aims, actions and policy areas.</p> <p>The workplan should be available on the Kilkenny Council's website with updates and evidence of outcomes.</p>
Encouraging real and active participation	In order for the PPN to continue to attract community representatives to key committees we need to be able to assure volunteers that giving up their time is worthwhile.	Corporate Service, informed by committee members and previous SPC submissions by the PPN network	To develop an agreed 'code of Conduct / operating protocol' that sets out minimum standards and expectations to ensure meaningful engagement with committee representatives.
Managing expectations	It is especially important to community volunteers that they have a clear understanding to impart to the bodies they represent about what they can achieve on their behalf. It needs to be clear to all members of the committee what they can realistically expect SPCs to achieve, for example in relation to how national policy may impact local policy.	<p>Corporate Services</p> <p>Support from PPN staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a diagram that explains the system of decision-making in the Council and how the SPCs, LCDC and other committees connect into this. • Create a user-friendly handbook on SPC committees for members. • Deliver some sort of induction/training session to all committee members to fully understand the nature of the committee and where it fits in the long-term vision for the county. • Have available case studies of where committees have been successful in informing change for the better
Timing and Nature of Information Dissemination	<p>Often committee members are sent lengthy, jargon filled documents at very short notice that are too onerous for volunteers to wade through and understand, never mind consult and engage with the rest of community on.</p> <p>One of the key functions of a PPN representative on an SPC is to gather and represent the views of PPN members.</p> <p>Therefore it is important that documentation that will be discussed and deliberated on in an SPC meeting is shared with PPN representatives</p>	Elected members, Administrative officers of SPCs and other committees	<p>Set an agreed (with all members) timeline for distribution of agenda and minutes (including any additional required reading)</p> <p>Kilkenny County Council work with the PPN to define an agreement for how information will be distributed, including the development of summary documents and ensuring that there are no unexplained acronyms or references.</p> <p>The PPN would request agendas and relevant information be circulated at least 4 weeks in advance of the meeting, not 2. This will give time for Reps to discuss with their group and pillar in preparation for the meeting.</p>

	<p>in a timely manner that allows them to:</p> <p>a) prepare for the meetings and to consult with the members of their nominating bodies in order to create the best foundation for meaningful debate.</p> <p>b) submit requests for information and items for the future workplan based on the engagement with the linkage groups. The current minimum of 2 weeks is not enough time for this.</p>		<p>In line with the following 'Local Authorities facilitate access to a library of relevant thematic documents focused on groups and committees that the Network are represented on' (Circular Letter CVSP 7/2019 Department of Rural & Community Development) that early access to hard and soft copies of all documents to be discussed at SPCs be made provided in advance to Kilkenny PPN Staff and Representatives.</p> <p>In the interests of transparency minutes should be available on the local authority's website, via the KCC Communications Officer, and in an accessible easy read format. The last time minutes were uploaded on the KK CoCo website was in 2022. Membership information should also be updated when changes occur, for instance when a new PPN Rep has been elected on an SPC.</p>
Scheduling and contributing to meetings	<p>It is important that PPN representatives are given equal opportunity to have community priorities reflected on meeting agendas.</p>	AOs	<p>That Kilkenny PPN representatives receive an invitation to contribute to the agenda of each meeting before it is circulated.</p> <p>That Kilkenny PPN staff working on behalf of the network, will receive an annual schedule of SPCs as soon as dates are available.</p> <p>That these agreed dates will not be changed during the year unless agreed by all the SPC members or alternatively to elect a SPC vice chair. This will prevent the need to reschedule already agreed SPC approved meeting dates. These dates are used to organise other rep group meetings. The movement of SPC meetings has an impact on PPN communications.</p> <p>That Kilkenny PPN staff will receive the minutes from the previous meeting and agenda and meeting documentation at least 4 weeks in advance of the meeting date, not 2 weeks, and that for an item to be included on the agenda it must be submitted 6 weeks before the meeting date. This is necessary to enable Kilkenny PPN staff to work with their representatives and member groups on Kilkenny's PPN's contribution to each meeting.</p>

Agreed Statement of outcomes	Committees such as 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. This does not allow for PPN reps to fulfil their representative commitments and accurately report back to the community.	AOs, Chair, Minute taker	<p>At the conclusion of each SPC meeting an agreed statement of outcomes and actions will be adopted by the membership and that this statement will be recorded by the administrator or minute taker and circulated to all SPC members within one-two weeks of the meeting having taken place, if not agreed at the end of each meeting.</p> <p>This statement of outcomes and actions must not replace the minutes but rather be complementary to them and facilitate the ongoing work between meetings. This would help to provide clarity in terms of the actions agreed at SPC meetings, while ensuring appropriate follow-up after discussions and a greater sense of continuity between meetings.</p>
Training	<p>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.</p> <p>Training in advance of the first meetings of the SPCs on the role of the SPCs, meeting skills and policy creation processes, would be an essential foundation on which to build their success.</p>	Relevant KCC AO supported by PPN staff	<p>Provision of robust and sustained training to include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Induction to SPCs, including Terms of reference and the processes and procedures of the SPCs. • Briefings on relevant policy, including the reform of Local Government • Workshops on the policy remit of SPCs, and how SPCs relate to LCDC and other Committees. • Briefing on the requirements of the Transparency Code.
Timing and hosting meetings	<p>As stated, Co Kilkenny PPN is a network of community and voluntary groups. The majority of these groups are volunteer run and led. Co Kilkenny PPN seeks representatives from these groups to fill community & voluntary, environmental and social inclusion seats on the</p> <p>SPC committees. 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.</p>	CE / Corporate Services	<p>For KCC to consider holding some meetings outside of normal working hours, including evening times, to accommodate volunteers and show them that their time is valued, in line with the recommendations in the IPA report on a review of SPCs, page 54,</p> <p>For KCC to offer remote access to meetings to allow reps to continue to attend without having to take large portions of their day to account for travel.</p>

Recognising and acknowledging PPN representation	Some PPN representatives are well known in their own field in Kilkenny and would liaise with many organisations and individuals as part of the everyday working and personal life. It is important that all committee members recognise that PPN representatives sit at decision making tables to represent the collective community and the PPN in general, not themselves or their specific sector.	AOs Corporate Services Committee Chairs	That the title PPN Representative (and where appropriate the college they are from) is put against the names of all reps on any written documentation and publicity involving committees. This concept should also be discussed in any training programme.
Enhancing Relationships	<p>The attitude and abilities of the chairperson play an important part in how PPN representatives experience their role on the various committees, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling respected by and equal to other members of the committee • Having an opportunity to share their experience and knowledge. • Feeling that their expertise and knowledge is used. • Knowing that their time, as volunteers, is valued. <p>PPN representatives are often coming into a culture and environment they are not familiar with. A positive atmosphere in the room makes members want to keep engaging with it.</p>	Chairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairpersons welcoming committee members and giving members of the committee the opportunity to introduce themselves as a standard procedure. • An informal meeting between the chairperson and Kilkenny PPN representatives before they attend their first meeting to discuss the committee. • Chairpersons briefly outlining procedures and protocols that will be followed during the meeting to all new members.
Enhancing Opportunities for PPN Representatives	<p>Clarity is needed regarding the ways in which PPN representatives can input into the work of the committees and the procedures, rules and processes for doing so.</p> <p>PPN representatives want be able to give of their best on committees. They feel they are being listened to and are contributing when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their comments are minuted • Their input is discussed • They receive feedback • They can see a result or outcome to their input. 	AO Committee Chairs	<p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use plain English and accessible language whenever possible, for example in documents and presentations. If acronyms are being used provide a list explaining what the acronyms mean. • A specific liaison person in the local authority for PPN representatives to contact with any questions relating to the committees. The liaison could meet new representatives before the first meeting and talk through key procedures. • A guaranteed response to any questions addressed to the liaison within an agreed time.

	<p>When PPN representatives make suggestions or recommendations into pieces of work it is essential that they are given feedback with regard to how these suggestions are being considered and whether action is being taken on them. Whether suggestions are taken on board or not, an explanation of why their suggestion has not been included is essential. This is so they feel their time on the committee is not wasted and will also mean in their accountability to the community they are able to give informed feedback.</p> <p>Presentations and updates frequently appear on committee agendas. Though informative, they can relate to matters that have already been decided elsewhere, with little opportunity for meaningful input or decision making by committee members. PPN members need to be told when agenda items are for information purposes or when engagement and input is required so they can priorities and streamline their engagement with the community.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback, for example from the chairperson, on why a representative's attempt to input into the SPC was unsuccessful. • Regular opportunities for committee members to give feedback and suggest improvements on how the committees are working, for example once a year. • PPN business as a regular item on the agenda. • PPN representatives being given the opportunity to make a presentation on their own area of expertise as it relates to strategic policy. • Changing the style of minuting SPC meetings to more clearly reflect what is discussed. • SPC chairpersons making it clear at the SPC meeting what information is confidential and what can be shared. Clarity given to PPN members when items on the agenda for SPCs are for information purposes only with matters already decided or when engagement and input is required.
Corporate Policy Group	Kilkenny PPN requests that as part of the draft scheme for SPCs a commitment is included to ensure that SPC members and SPCs receive timely updates from the Corporate Policy Group.	AO with responsibility for CPG	<p>That a system is developed to give PPN representatives on the SPCs insight into updates from the CPG.</p> <p>Up to date CPG minutes and/or draft minutes be circulated to all SPCs as part of their notice of meeting package along with the agenda and SPC minutes. We request that each SPC and each member of it should receive the minutes of all Corporate Policy Group Meetings that have taken place since the previous SPC meeting</p>
National Key stakeholders			To include Failte Ireland and their National Inclusion Team in the table of National contacts of key stakeholders (Appendix II)
Principals			Ensure that all venues used for council meetings are fully disability and wheelchair accessible.