



## Galway County Public Participation Network

### Linkage Group Terms of Reference

**Name** of Linkage Group:

**About:** Linkage Groups bring together PPN members who have a particular interest in a certain area. They are sub-groups which connect the PPN with Galway County Council and other Advisory/Decision Making Boards in the County of Galway

**Role:** Linkage Groups enable PPN members to participate in shaping Council decisions that affect them.

Linkage Groups are developed when a specialist committee/board seeks community and voluntary representation on their structure. The PPN will then notify its members and convene a meeting of interested parties. This meeting then forms the Linkage Group which will then nominate a representative to sit on the committee/board. The representative will maintain contact with the Linkage Group to ensure two-way communication between the PPN and that committee/board. The Linkage Group will also support the representative.

#### **1. Background:**

Linkage Groups are thematic sub-groups of the PPN. Galway is currently in the process of setting up 6 Linkage Groups, each of which relate to the services or functions of Galway County Council or other specific agencies in Galway County.

Linkage Groups are a collection of PPN member organisations that have either a remit or an interest in these services or functions. Linkage Groups elect representatives from amongst their membership to sit on Council committees and other fora on behalf of the PPN. These representatives are accountable to the wider membership of the PPN via Linkage Groups. Through these representatives, the PPN participates in shaping policies that affect Galway County communities, and is kept informed of developments within the relevant fora.

#### **2. Role of Linkage Groups:**

The role of the Linkage Group is to:

- a) Elect representative(s) to the Board/Committee (such as a Strategic Policy Committee)

- b) Discuss and debate the matters being discussed by the Board or Committee or other strategic / policy matters as identified and, where relevant, to prioritise and develop policy positions on these
- c) Mandate the representative to bring forward the views of the Linkage Group through a variety of mechanisms (such as at consultation processes, at decision-making committee meetings, in policy papers)
- d) Put in place an effective and realistic communication system with representative(s) and with each other
- e) Censure/remove representative(s) if they are not fulfilling their role effectively in line with the PPN Charter. In a situation where the Linkage Group wishes to remove or censure a representative, they will do so in close co-operation with the PPN Coordinator and Secretariat and in line with the PPN Exit Policy, disciplinary procedures and any other relevant procedure
- f) Work with the PPN Secretariat and report back to the Plenary, as relevant
- g) Work collaboratively with other Linkage Groups and representatives to further the aims of PPN.

### **3. Structure of Linkage Groups:**

3.1 All members on a Linkage Group have equal status

3.2 The Linkage Group has no Chairperson or Secretary. Instead, a Facilitator is appointed annually by the Linkage Group to conduct meetings and to facilitate communication with the PPN Co-ordinator. The Facilitator must be one of the PPN Representatives.

3.3 Sub-groups of the Linkage Group are established, as required, to oversee agreed areas of business. Terms of Reference for sub-groups are developed, as appropriate, by each subgroup. Sub-groups are required to report to the Linkage Group on all matters.

### **4. Role of the Facilitator:**

4.1 The role of the Facilitator is an administrative one and includes:

- actively facilitating meetings
- signing relevant documentation on behalf of Linkage Group
- ensuring effective communication with the PPN Co-ordinator

4.2 The role of the Facilitator rotates annually, as agreed by consensus, and is alternated to ensure that a gender balance is maintained within the role

4.3 The Facilitator is not the sole / main representative of the Linkage Group, as all Linkage Group members have equal representative status

4.4 The wider role of the Facilitator of the Linkage Group is to:

- a) Guide the work of the Linkage Group
- b) Plan the work of the Linkage Group to achieve its objectives

- c) Assist the Linkage Group members to understand their common goal
- d) Provide leadership without taking over
- e) Encourage members of the group to take on tasks and get involved in progressing issues
- f) Support elected PPN Representatives who have been elected to represent the PPN on policy committees

## **5. Meeting Agenda:**

5.1 In advance of all meetings, the Facilitator issues a draft agenda to all Linkage Group members for their input

5.2 Linkage Group members are entitled to request an agenda item by contacting the Facilitator and/or the PPN Co-ordinator. Requests must be made a minimum of 7 working days in advance of Linkage Group meetings

5.3 Agendas are set by the Facilitator and Co-ordinator

5.4 The agenda and minutes are distributed by the Facilitator 5 working days prior to meetings

5.5 The standard agenda is:

- Apologies
- Adoption of the Agenda
- Minutes and Matters Arising
- Correspondence
- Issues and Updates
- AOB

## **6. Minutes:**

6.1 Minutes are taken by a PPN representative, other than the Facilitator, using a standard template

6.2 Minutes are proposed and seconded at meetings

6.3 Minutes reflect decisions taken, actions agreed, and a synopsis of the discussion

6.4 Minutes are published on the PPN website within 10 days of being adopted by the Linkage Group

## **7. Meetings:**

7.1 Location and Timing

- a) Meeting venues will be decided based on accessibility and cost factors
- b) Meetings will be held at dates/times suitable for the majority of members

## 7.2 Frequency of Meetings

- a) Linkage Groups will meet, ideally, 4 times per year, but at least twice annually

## 7.3 Meeting Attendance

- a) There is no requirement for members to participate in a minimum number of Linkage Group meeting

## 7.5 Quorum

- a) A Linkage Group meeting is deemed to have a quorum when attendance is a minimum of 4, inclusive of representatives.
- b) In the event of Linkage Group meetings being held together, the quorum is 10

## 7.6 Planning Meeting

- a) One Linkage Group meeting a year will be a planning meeting, where Linkage Groups' priority actions for the coming year are agreed and direction provided to representatives on key matters of importance to the Linkage Group

## **8. Decision-Making:**

8.1 The ruling body of the PPN is the Plenary. As such, the Linkage Group's decision-making functions are limited to issues relevant to the Boards and Committees they relate to. In this regard, the following applies:

- a) Decisions are made by consensus where possible, or otherwise by majority vote
- b) The Facilitator has the casting vote
- c) A decision must be taken on whether proxy voting is allowed

## **9. Membership:**

### 9.1 Joining a Linkage Group

- a) The Secretariat invites PPN member organisations to join one or more Linkage Groups
- b) Member organisations self-select the Linkage Group(s) they wish to join and can join as many as they wish, or none
- c) Member organisations may nominate a maximum of two individuals to attend each Linkage Group on their behalf
- d) Each PPN member organisation has one vote

- e) In the event of the nominated members being unable to attend a meeting, proxy members may attend in their place. The group must notify the PPN Co-ordinator & Meeting Facilitator in advance
- f) Membership of the Linkage Group is for the term of the Council (5 years)
- g) If a member organisation wishes to leave a Linkage Group, they should inform the PPN Coordinator in writing (by letter or email)

## 9.2 Equality

- a) Members are requested to commit to equality, non-discrimination and to strive for gender balance in terms of Linkage Group membership.

## 9.3 Code of Conduct

- a) Linkage Group members are required to comply with the PPN Code of Conduct
- b) If a member brings the Linkage Group or the PPN into disrepute or undermines it, a process is put in place to address the issue in line with the PPN's agreed disciplinary procedures in line with National Guidelines
- c) All members of the PPN are expected to act in accordance with the principles of the PPN. Any failure to do so may result in the member being asked to step down from the Linkage Group
- d) Linkage Group members are required to work in the best interest of Galway County PPN, rather than in the interest of their Municipal District, Sector or Nominating Body.

## 9.4 Rights of the Linkage Group members

- a) Receive relevant information about the work of the committee to help them to participate fully
- a) Receive regular communications (at least as frequently as committee meetings are held) from their elected representative(s) on matters such as dates of committee meetings, agendas and reports (these are also available on the PPN website and should be accessed there)
- b) Have regular discussions by an agreed mechanism (face to face / on-line conference calls / email / Zoom, etc.)
- c) Have relevant issues pursued in partnership with the Linkage Group Facilitator and Linkage Group Representative(s)
- d) Have Linkage Group discussions facilitated in an open inclusive way, and the views of all members accommodated
- e) Have administrative support from the Galway County PPN staff