



PPN Policy Statement on the functioning Committees

WHAT IS THE PPN?

*Public Participation Networks (PPNs) were established following the report of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government (2013), which recommended that communities be given **more of a say in decisions taken by local government** (their Local Authorities or Councils). The recommended way to do this was through the PPNs, which were written into law in the **Local Government Reform Act 2014**.*

This law means that there should be a PPN in every Local Authority area.

The main reason the PPNs were set up is to enable community groups to be represented and to feed into local government decision-making in a way that is fair, clear and respectful.

- PPN Handbook (2020), page 8

This is a policy statement written on behalf of the Galway County PPN representatives following a 'Representatives Forum' meeting held on 25 May 2021.

At this meeting Representatives participated in a refresher training course addressing their role and purpose as representatives and also discussed shared issues and concerns.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PPN REPRESENTATIVES?

*Local Authorities and other local bodies have a range of Committees and Boards to support them to develop policy by involving external expertise. This expertise can be drawn from sectoral interests such as employers, farmers, trades unions and the **community**.*

Community representation – that of the Community and Voluntary, Social Inclusion and Environmental sectors - is a core function of the PPN.

*Other groups who have representation through other pillars of social partnership e.g. trade unions, farming and business organisations, **cannot seek representation through the PPN.***

*The **Local Authority must use the PPN to appoint Community Representatives** to these Boards and Committees and to ensure that they are listened to. PPN Representatives **must then provide feedback to the PPN and their Linkage Group**, within the limits of confidentiality, about what was discussed at their meetings and the outcomes of these discussions. It is **the responsibility of the PPN Representatives to provide this feedback.***

- PPN Handbook (2020), page 40

It was agreed that to improve their **experiences and effectiveness** as community representatives, elected by the PPN (a network of over 1050 member groups,



representing over 10,000 individuals), the PPN Reps would issue a Statement outlining some ideas to help them carry out their roles.

Aware that each Committee operates slightly differently, the PPN Reps have identified the following practices which could support their work:

- Issuing a document of **Action Items** arising from each meeting
- Sharing of minutes and other documentation in a **timely manner**, ie to allow enough time to process these
- Ensuring that each representative is **introduced** to the whole Committee, its purpose and remit and each of its Members. This may need to be repeated if new representatives join
- If possible, an **agenda of all 4 meetings** to take place for the year ahead, including a '**Programme of Work**' indicating which policy issues will be addressed over the year. This would be very helpful for PPN Reps who are obliged to report back on policy developments and consult with Linkage groups on policy developments taking place

The PPN Reps play an integral role in delivering on the model of **Deliberative Democracy** that is being pursued by the Irish Government. The PPN reps are there to represent the **community voice in local decision-making** as laid out in the Welfare Reform Act 2014.



The PPN welcome engagement and feedback and can be contacted through the PPN Workers: administrator@galwaycountypn.ie

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PPN AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES?

*The relationship with the Local Authority is one of the key relationships of the PPN. It is through **representation on Local Authority Boards and Committees** that the PPN can fulfil its core objective of supporting its Member Groups to **participate in local government decision-making**.*

It is important that this relationship works well for both the PPN and the Local Authority and that any issues can be dealt with quickly and locally, as much as possible.

*To progress the work of the PPN, the Local Authorities and PPNs **must work together and engage meaningfully** with each other to their **mutual benefit**.*

*The PPN is the **primary way that Local Authorities get inputs for consultations** with their communities and PPNs play a key role in supporting the development of each Local Authority area.*

***Positive relationships between PPN and the Local Authority are essential for success**. This should be a relationship based on **equality and partnership, respectful of each other's boundaries and the independence of the PPNs**.*

PPNs can support the work of the Local Authority by collaborating on consultations with their Member Groups and encouraging support for relevant Local Authority initiatives where these are of benefit to their members.

- PPN Handbook (2020), page78