

12th March 2019

Council Chamber, Wexford County Hall

Today's Agenda....



- Welcome & Introduction
- What is Local Government
- The role of elected members
- The role of appointed officials
- How decisions are made – council meetings
- Reserved Functions
- Bodies that shape councils' policies and decisions – CPG, SPC, LCDC, MDs, PPNs
- Ways to get involved in local decision making



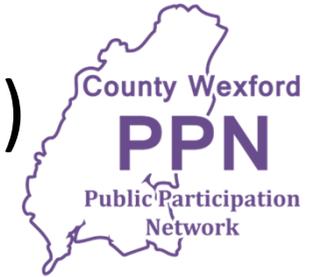
What is Local Government



- Local government in Ireland operates through a network of local authorities – city and county councils.
- Councils make policies and provide services to people in their local communities.
- They work within a legal framework, which means they are bound by legislation e.g. the Planning Acts, Housing Acts etc.
- They maintain local roads and parks, manage local planning and land development, and provide social housing, community, arts and sports facilities.
- There are 31 local authorities.
- The Local Authority for the county is Wexford County Council (Comhairle Contae Loch Garman)
- The Local Authority involves both **Elected Members** and **Appointed Officials**



The Role Of Elected Members (Councillors)



- The public face of our councils are the **Councillors** who are elected at local elections held every five years.
- The number of councillors per council is based loosely on the size of the population in each local authority area. In Wexford we have **34 Councillors**
- The elected council is in law the policy-making arm of the local authority – Councillors have the role of creating the overall policy framework that the council’s staff work within.
- A significant role of Councillors is to represent the views of their communities. They identify and track local problems or issues and bring proposals to officials.
- Councillors receive a salary-type payment and allowances.
- Elections are held every five years and are by single transferable vote. The next election is **24 May 2019**



The Role Of Appointed Officials



- Day-to-day oversight of the work of a council is carried out by a professional (unelected, that is appointed) Chief Executive, and a team of officials.
- Chief Executives were formerly known as City or County Managers.
- A Chief Executive's team includes:
 - Directors of Service, who head up council departments which are responsible for key local services. These include land planning, housing, economic, community, and environmental issues.
 - Senior and Senior Executive / Technical Officers, who are the management tier below Directors of Service. They oversee a council's day-to-day work.

How Councils Make Decisions

– Council Meetings



- Local authorities conduct their formal business at **monthly council meetings**. These are attended by both elected councillors and council staff (officials).
- The purpose of these meetings is to allow councillors to carry out their **policy-making role** and to receive updates from the Chief Executive on the ongoing work of the council.
- Council meetings in Wexford are held on the second Monday of each month.
- In general, the only items that can be discussed at council meetings are those that are already on the agenda or those that are required to be dealt with by law (like voting on the annual Budget). However, in exceptional circumstances, councillors can discuss urgent or topical issues.
- Council Meetings are open to the public, but you must book in advance.



Reserved Functions



- When it comes to council policies and bye-laws, councillors have some specific and exclusive powers, known as ‘reserved powers’ or ‘**reserved functions**’.
- Chief Executives must get the formal backing of Councillors before they can do anything in areas covered by Councillors’ reserved powers.
- The most important reserved powers are to do with:
 - Adopting the Council’s annual Budget
 - Adopting a County Development Plan every six years
 - Making bye-laws – for example, setting local traffic speed limits
- Council functions that are not reserved for elected members are referred to as ‘**executive**’ functions and are the responsibility of the Chief Executive and staff. For example, Councillors have no authority over staffing issues, which are ‘executive’ functions.



Bodies that shape councils' policies and decisions



- Each council has a **range of bodies** which meet to develop advice and offer recommendations on policy the Council and the Chief Executive.
- These structures are part of the complex interplay between officials, public representatives and community volunteers that shape councils' policies and priorities.
- They function effectively as council sub-committees, although strictly speaking not all of them are actual sub-committees.



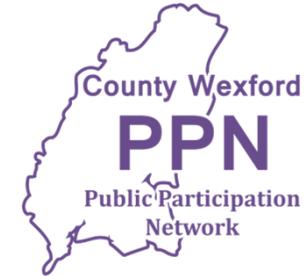
Strategic Policy Committees

Strategic
Policy
Committees



- Each council must establish Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) to provide input in relation to the formulation, development, monitoring and review of council policy in key areas.
- Typically, a council will have several SPCs dealing with policy in relation to key services, like housing, planning, transportation, the environment, economic development and recreation/culture. In Wexford there are 4 SPCs and a Joint Policing Committee.
- Councillors make up about two-thirds of the membership of SPCs. The remaining places are filled by representatives nominated by local employers, trade unions, farming, social inclusion, voluntary and environmental interests. The idea is that these external members bring additional professional knowledge and expertise to the SPCs.
- Policy positions agreed by SPCs are sent to the full council for approval at a council meeting. Many SPC recommendations are either adopted in full by councils, or with minor amendments only.
- SPCs generally meet four times a year.

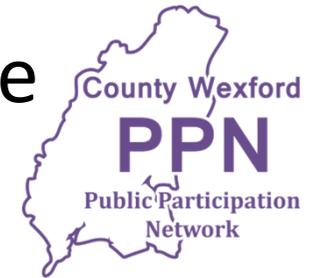
Municipal Districts



- Across Ireland, a total of 95 Municipal Districts were established in 2014, creating a new sub-county structure. They are part of a restructuring of local government which also saw the abolition of Town Councils.
- Each council now has between two and six Municipal Districts. Wexford currently has four Municipal Districts but this will change for the 2019 elections.
- Municipal Districts are not directly elected in themselves. Instead, their members are all existing elected councillors drawn from the local electoral area that the district covers.
- The rationale behind Municipal Districts is to allow certain decisions to be made at a more local level so that very local issues do not have to be considered in detail at county council level. For example if a new traffic system was being proposed for a particular town, the relevant Municipal District would discuss its pros and cons in detail before adopting a position. This would then be recorded in the minutes of the Municipal District meeting, to be sent to the council for approval and funding.
- Municipal Districts meet monthly.



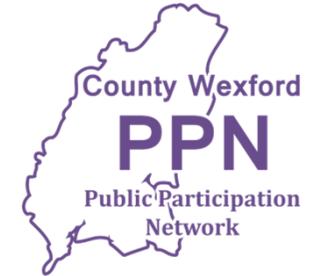
Local Community Development Committee



- Each local authority must have a Local Community Development Committee. (LCDC).
- LCDCs were set up as part of a restructuring of local government introduced in 2014. The LCDC is to develop, co-ordinate and implement a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development.
- LCDC members include councillors, representatives of the local partnership/LEADER companies, nominees of the statutory sector such as social protection and education, social partners and nominees from Public Participation Networks (more on PPN later).
- In Wexford, some of the tasks undertaken by the LCDC are as follows:
 - Implements and monitor a six-year Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) for Wexford
 - Oversees the distribution of EU funds such as the Social Inclusion and Community Action Programme (SICAP) and LEADER funding.
- Wexford LCDC has 19 Members.

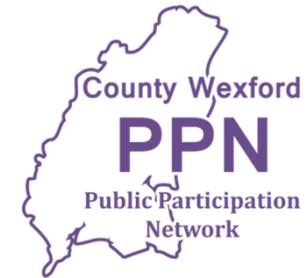


Corporate Policy Group



- Each council has a **Corporate Policy Group**. This consists of the Chief Executive, Cathaoirleach, and the chairs of each of the Strategic Policy Committees, and representation of the Municipal District ,where appropriate .
- The Corporate Policy Group (CPG) is an in-house forum (it does not meet in public).
- The idea is that key issues affecting a council and its residents can be reviewed by members of the Corporate Policy Group before being brought to a meeting of the full council.
- For example, the Chief Executive will present a policy document such as strategic plans or bye-laws which are considered by the Corporate Policy Group.
- The Corporate Policy Group is also a link between council officials and elected members and the work of the different Strategic Policy Committees.
- The chairs of each Strategic Policy Committee report back to their respective committees on the group's work.

Public Participation Networks (PPNs)



- PPNs are up and running in all 31 local authority areas around Ireland.
- They are **independent networks** made up of **groups/organisations** from the community & voluntary, social inclusion, and environmental sectors. Groups associated with the PPN must be not for profit and volunteer led.
- The idea is that these networks provide a **formal structure** for organised civil society to a greater say in local government decisions which affect their own communities. The aim is more transparent, better informed and improved decisions.
- The functions of a PPNs can be summarised as Informing, Developing & Representing
 - **Informing** – Sharing information about consultations, training events, funding opportunities, member events etc
 - **Developing** – Helping groups to develop themselves through access to conferences, training, mentoring, networking, seminars etc.
 - **Representing** – offering community a seat and a voice at the decision-making tables within the county.



wexfordppn@wexfordcoco.ie



www.wexfordppn.ie



Bodies that shape councils' policies and decisions



Ways to get involved in local decision making



- Voters elect the members of their councils. The next local election will be held on **24th May 2019**. Make sure you are registered to vote by 7th May.
- While people rarely get involved with the work of their local authorities unless an issue affects them in a very direct way, there are many good reasons for doing so.
- If you want to see change in your locality, it is open to you as a resident, business person or member of a group to approach your Councillor to:
 - Get information on any situation or policy
 - Raise any issues or problems
 - Seek changes or improvements to council policies or services
- This is the traditional route for residents to get involved in council activities is through their locally elected Councillors. However, there are other ways you can get involved.....

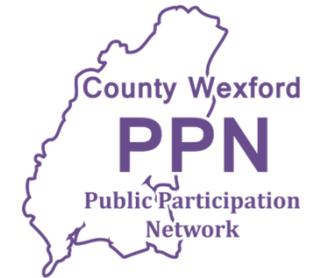
How to get involved



- If you would like to become more involved in understanding or shaping local issues, here are some other ways that you can engage with your council:
 - Join a Residents' Association or Community Group
 - Have your community group join the PPN
 - Take part in public consultations both locally and nationally
 - Make a submission on the Development Plan and other local plans



And finally.....



Some resources to find out more information.....

- Wexford County Council Website – www.wexfordcoco.ie
- Wexford PPN Website – www.wexfordppn.ie

More on Local Government

- TASC - www.tasc.ie/opengovtoolkit
- Citizens Information - https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/government_in_ireland/local_and_regional_government/





Any Questions?