

Wexford Public Participation Network



Constitution

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Introduction

The Wexford Public Participation Network was set up as part of the framework for public participation in local government and it has a statutory basis in the Local Government Reform Act 2014 (Section 46).

It is the main link through which the Local Authority and connects the Community and Voluntary, Social Inclusion and Environmental groups in County Wexford.

Wexford County PPN aims to enable community organisations to articulate a diverse range of views and interests within the local government system, and to allow a diversity of voices and interests to be facilitated and involved in the decision-making process of Wexford County Council and other relevant bodies.

Objectives

Wexford PPN will work with the community, voluntary and environmental sectors to:

- Facilitate and contribute to opportunities for networking, communication, and the sharing of information.
- Strengthen these sectors' capacity to contribute positively to the community.
- Identify issues of collective concern and ensure the sectors have a strong collective voice.
- Acknowledge and promote the contribution the community & voluntary social inclusion, and environmental sectors make to society.
- Actively support inclusion of socially excluded groups, communities experiencing high levels of poverty and communities experiencing discrimination
- Encourage and enable participation in local decision making and planning of services.
- Take an active formal role in policy making and oversight committees of the Wexford Local authority. Ensure clear and transparent mechanisms for the selection of members of the community & voluntary, social inclusion, and environmental sectors to participate in policy making fora and facilitate elections onto decision making bodies.
- Facilitate a high level of accountability and feedback mechanisms to PPN members. Engage members in processes that will feed into policies and plans and provide a strong voice of community, voluntary and environmental sectors on local decision-making structures.
- Support member groups and individual members of the PPN to develop their capacity to do their own work effectively and to participate effectively in the activities of the PPN.
- Act as the vehicle to gather feedback and input into policies and plans being developed by Wexford local authority, reflecting both areas of agreement and disagreement, and, where there is no consensus, the range of views.
- Work to affect national and regional policies in collaboration with other PPNs.

Values and Principles

Wexford PPN will adhere to the following values and principles:

- A. Implement and abide by the principles of good governance structures, policies, and procedures. Be inclusive of all volunteer led groups in the county and value diversity by actively seeking the inclusion of groups which may traditionally be marginalised. Work in a collaborative, transparent and fair way
- B. Be accountable to its member groups.
- C. Be participatory in its approach.
- D. Be open and transparent in its processes, procedures, dealing with member groups, representatives, Local Authority etc.
- E. Act as an independent body from the local authority and of any other vested interests

Criteria for membership of the PPN

To qualify for membership, groups must fulfil the following criteria:

- A. Groups are not-for-profit and operate within the community, voluntary and environmental sectors.
- B. Have more than three (3) members.
- C. Have an appropriate governance structure e.g., a written constitution operating rules and procedures.
- D. Be a minimum of six months in existence.
- E. Be open to new members.
- F. Have a formal structure e.g., Chairperson, Secretary or Equivalent.
- G. Be active and have a postal address in County Wexford.
- H. Be broadly representative and accountable.
- I. Hold an Annual General Meeting and have regular meetings.
- J. Be non-party political, not a business, anti-sectarian and non-discriminatory.
- K. Be independent, with a committee or board (not a substructure or subcommittee).
- L. Are volunteer led [organisations can have paid staff but must be under voluntary control].
- M. Be able to establish their bona fides as a community or voluntary organisation and provide documentation if requested to do so.
- N. Because of the separation of the functions of Public Representatives and the PPN, Councillors, TDs, MEPs, and elected officials should not be the contact point for member organisations.
- O. Renew their membership every 2 years.
- P. Ensure to notify the PPN Office of any changes in details of the primary contact person for group.
- Q. Groups that are members of Wexford PPN appoint a delegate to endeavour to attend all PPN meetings, to foster the participation and engagement necessary to fully carry out the spirit, ethos, and goals of our strategic plan to inform, represent and develop our communities.

Wexford PPN Structure

A. Wexford PPN is organised at County and Municipal District Level and shall be composed of its registered member groups in the county.

B. The PPN is made up of several interconnected structures, these are:

1. The County Plenary
2. Municipal Districts
3. Representatives on Local Authority Committees and other committees relevant to furthering the spirit, ethos and work of the Public Participation Network and the groups it represents.
4. Secretariat and Support Staff
5. Thematic/Linkage Groups

The Plenary

A. The County Plenary is the ruling body and main decision-making body of the PPN and will consist of all PPN registered membership groups in the county.

B. Its role is to direct the operation of the PPN, setting overall PPN policy and procedures, to agree the annual workplan and budget and develop a wellbeing statement for current and future generations in County Wexford.

Note: *The elected secretariat is responsible for the administration of the PPN between Plenary meetings. Subsets of the PPN such as Municipal Districts and Linkage/Thematic Groups also inform the process.*

C. It will meet a minimum of two times per year to review the workings of the PPN and set the agenda for the coming period.

D. Plenary meetings will be held in person.

E. Plenary Meetings are a forum for member groups to network and to hear about matters of interest to them.

F. All PPN members are entitled to 21 days' notice of a Plenary meeting.

G. The Plenary will adhere to the objectives set out in section under Objectives.

H. All PPN members will opt to be a member of a Voluntary and Community, Social Inclusion or Environmental college. Each member organisation may select two people to represent them on the County Plenary.

J. Each membership organisation will have one vote at the County Plenary.

K. A special meeting of the Plenary can be called if requested by two thirds of membership groups by petition of members.

Decision Making Powers of the Plenary

A. The County Plenary hosts elections of:

- ✓ PPN members to the LCDC and other committees through the electoral colleges
- ✓ Other committees and decision-making structures by establishing and facilitating Linkage (Interest) Groups and electoral colleges
- ✓ The Secretariat, as required, at a meeting of the County Plenary

B. The County Plenary also:

- ✓ endorses any reviews undertaken on the work of the PPN
 - ✓ delegates the day to day running of the PPN to the Secretariat
 - ✓ adopts and makes amendments to the PPN Constitution
- Decisions made between plenary meetings, including the election of representatives, must be presented for ratification to the following meeting.

Procedures for Plenary Meetings

- A. Plenary Meeting shall be deemed valid if at least 15% of the Member Organisations are represented, a minimum of 4 Secretariat members are present, and a minimum of 21 days' notice of the meeting have been given.
- B. A record of attendance will be kept for all meetings by the minute taker.
Registration for meetings is mandatory and includes registration by members, secretariat, and staff.
Minutes of meetings will be published on the PPN website, following approval by the Secretariat.
- C. Plenary meetings will be facilitated/chaired by a person nominated by the Secretariat.
- D. If considered appropriate by the Secretariat, a non-member may be invited to attend a meeting and speak on a specific agenda item.
- E. Motions for discussion should be submitted to the Secretariat 7 days before a plenary meeting. A motion can be submitted by any registered member of the PPN, a Linkage (Interest) group, municipal plenary, or electoral college.
- F. Decisions of the Plenary will be made by taking a vote. 15% of member groups must be present to constitute a decision-making quorum for the purposes of decisions made at a Plenary. This is for in person or virtual Plenary meetings. That 15% of groups present at the meeting have the authority to make the decisions on the Plenary night.
- G. A notification is sent to all the Plenary members of the decisions of that plenary. If less than 15% of member groups are represented, the people who are present will agree a position on the decision which will then be sent to all Plenary members. Plenary members then can vote for or against the decision. If no member comes back the decision of the members stands. The majority from both meeting and email responses is 50% + 1.
- H. If there is a tie in a vote, the chairperson will have the casting vote. The Rotating Chair/Facilitator will act in accordance with the agreed view of the wider PPN membership.

A Plenary Meeting shall be deemed a valid meeting if at least 15 % of the Member Organisations are represented and also only if at least four of those present are members of the Secretariat. There must also be an automatic and guaranteed 21 days' notice of the meeting.

If a quorum is not available, those present may elect to proceed with either of the following: (Per Circular 1. CVSP1/2022 DRCD)

Option A

- *The meeting should be postponed and rescheduled for a more suitable date, no later than one calendar month after the date of the original meeting.*
- *In the event that a quorum is not present at the rescheduled meeting, and provided that those in attendance consist of a simple majority (that is, half plus one) of all groups registered to attend the meeting, the number of participants present will be deemed to be the quorum and the meeting will be validly held.*
- *No objections to proceedings, including resolutions, ratifications, and decisions, of the rescheduled meeting shall be permitted on the basis that there was no valid quorum in attendance at the originally scheduled meeting.*

Option B

- *Determine that the current attendance at the plenary is sufficient for the plenary to proceed. Decisions made at this plenary will be validly passed by a simple majority (that is, half plus one) of those in attendance.*

In any event, if over 50% of the Secretariat Members' terms have expired by the date of the holding of the Plenary meeting, or the rescheduled Plenary meeting, whichever shall apply, the requirement that the quorum include four Secretariat Members will cease to apply.

Municipal District Plenary

- A. Wexford County is organised into five Municipal Districts (Wexford, Gorey/Kilmuckridge, Enniscorthy, New Ross & Rosslare).
- B. Each Municipal District Plenary is made up of all registered members (i.e., of the Community and Voluntary, Social Inclusion, and Environmental electoral colleges) in each of Wexford's Municipal Districts which deal with locally based matters.
- C. Municipal District Plenary meetings are called by the Secretariat representative for each district. Each member organisation may select two people to represent them on Plenary of the Municipal District PPN and will have one vote.
- D. The Municipal District PPN will be guided by the vision, values, and objectives of the PPN and report to the Plenary annually on their activities.
- E. Member organisations of the Municipal District PPN may also be members of the County PPN.
- F. A special meeting of the Municipal District Plenary can be called if requested by two thirds of its membership by petition.

Decision Making Powers of the Municipal District Plenary

The Municipal District Plenary can develop and submit policy proposals as agreed by their membership and can establish their own committee to coordinate the activities of the Municipal District Plenary.

Linkage (Interest) Groups

Linkage Groups are the way that Wexford PPN members have input into policy in their area of operation and operate by bringing together member organisations with a common interest to discuss their diverse views and interests in a specific policy area.

All PPN membership groups have the option of joining one or more Linkage (Interest) Groups to link with a specific committee/s where the PPN is being represented.

The Linkage (Interest) Group:

- ✓ Discuss and debate issues of relevance to the committee
- ✓ Informs the representative on the committee of their views
- ✓ Reports to the Plenary annually, through a report issued by the Secretariat
- ✓ Should have the opportunity to agree the contents of the report, where agreement has not been reached this should be stated
- ✓ Encourage new members participation. The Linkage (Interest) Group representative feeds back to the Linkage (Interest) Group
- ✓ Engage in 2-way communication on matters and in a variety of ways including face to face, electronically and remotely
- ✓ Is accountable to the linkage Group
- ✓ Must adhere to the Representatives Charter

Decision Making Powers of Linkage (Interest) Groups

Elect representatives onto Council Committees seeking nominations. Can censure or remove a rep, if two thirds of Linkage (Interest) group members agree that they are not fulfilling the terms of the representative's charter. Can develop and submit policy proposals as agreed by their membership.

Secretariat

The Secretariat is at county level and is broad and representative of the different geographical areas and the three electoral colleges [Community and Voluntary, Social Inclusion and Environment] within County Wexford and reflective of the diversity of the membership and shall:

- A. Be made up of eleven members, two from each of the three electoral colleges and one from each of the five municipal districts and be elected by the County Plenary.
- B. Facilitate the implementation of decisions made by the Plenary.
- C. Act as the coordinating body of the PPN and facilitate the PPN's day to day business.
- D. Facilitate and monitor effective communication between member groups and PPN representatives to ensure quality input into decision-making structures.
- E. Ensure procedures for elections are adhered to.
- F. Act as a support to representatives.
- G. Develop and oversee an annual work-plan for the PPN in agreement with Wexford County Council and carry out reviews as appropriate.

PPN Workers

PPN Workers are made up of a Resource Worker and a Support Worker. Workers will provide support and take direction from the Secretariat (management committee) of the Public Participation Network.

The PPN Workers are responsible for the day-to-day activities of the PPN and for enabling the delivery of the aims and purpose of the PPN in line with the agreed workplan.

Decision Making Powers of the Secretariat

The Secretariat of the PPN will:

- A. Make decisions in relation to the effective day to day running of the PPN, in adherence to the objectives set out in section Objectives.
- B. Establish appropriate sub-committees/task groups or other sub-structures to effectively carry out their functions. Sub-structures should have clear remits and tasks in order to avoid duplication of effort — the establishment of ad hoc groups that are task-specific and wound-up once the task is completed is encouraged.
- C. Manage and monitor the budget of the PPN.
- D. Establish financial and governance subcommittees, which will report to the Secretariat at least twice annually.
- E. Agree and oversee the implementation of the workplan with the local authority and review it regularly.
- F. Develop a communication policy.
- G. Manage staff for the PPN in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding agreed with the Wexford Co.Co.
- H. Devise and implement an annual work-plan for the PPN. Establish processes for the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the PPN.
- I. Maintain the County Register of all membership groups, a copy of which will be maintained by the local authority in accordance with Section 128 of the Local Government Act 2001.
- J. Facilitate the establishment of Linkage (Interest) Groups by notifying all PPN members and organising meetings.
- K. Inform Linkage (Interest) groups/electoral colleges if a representative is not adhering to the Representatives charter.

Procedures for Meetings of the Secretariat

- A. The Secretariat shall hold a minimum of four meetings per year and will appoint a Facilitator and deputy Facilitator (see Secretariat Standing Orders).
- B. Attendance records shall be kept at meetings of the Secretariat and work reported to the Plenary annually.
- C. Any member from among those present may be chosen to act as Rotating Chair/Facilitator for that specific meeting or a term decided by the Secretariat.
- D. The Facilitator will liaise with staff to set the agenda for Secretariat meetings.
- E. The quorum for all meetings of the Secretariat shall be one third plus one of all Secretariat members.
- F. Notice for meetings along with agenda should be circulated to members prior to the date of the meeting.
- G. All members can suggest items for the agenda up to 7 days before the meeting takes place.
- H. Minutes of all meetings must be adopted by the secretariat members, signed by the Facilitator (for that meeting) and a copy kept on file. Where possible, decisions of the Secretariat will be taken by consensus, but in the event of a vote being required, decisions will be carried by a simple majority of all members present.
- I. In the case of a tied vote the nominated Facilitator for the meeting will hold the casting vote.
- J. If a Secretariat member misses one meeting without apologies, the facilitator will contact them. If two meetings are missed without apologies, they will be contacted in writing by the facilitator. If they miss a third meeting, they must give an explanation in writing as to why they should stay on the Secretariat.
- K. Elections will be held at the end of the Secretariat members' three-year term. A retiring Secretariat member shall be eligible for re-election; however, no Secretariat member will serve for a period of more than two consecutive terms.

Membership and Electoral Colleges

- A. When joining the PPN, membership groups must opt to be a part of one of three electoral colleges within the PPN which represents their primary interest: Environment, Social Inclusion or Community & Voluntary.
- B. To join the Social Inclusion Electoral College an organisation's primary objectives and activities must focus on social inclusion / social justice / equality.
- C. To join the Environment Electoral College an organisation's primary objectives and activities must be environmental (i.e., ecological) protection and/or environmental sustainability. Membership of this Electoral College will be validated by the National Environmental Pillar.
- D. Organisations whose primary objectives are other than those listed above will be members of the Community & Voluntary Electoral College.
- E. All nominees who put themselves forward for election should adhere to the Charter for Representatives.

County Structures - Policy Making Bodies/Committees

Wexford County Council and other local bodies have a range of Policy Making Bodies, Committees and Boards to support them in their work and policy development.

In County Wexford these decision -making bodies/committees include:

Local Community & Development Committee [LCDC]

As per LCDC regulations it is prescribed that a minimum of three persons representing Community and Voluntary interests, a minimum of two persons representing Social Inclusion interests and a minimum of one person representing Environmental interests be included on the Committee. Other committees with PPN reps include:

Joint Policing Committee

Economic Development & Enterprise SPC

Housing & Community SPC

Environment and Climate Change SPC

Transportation and water services SPC

Planning and Building Control SPC

Wexford Healthy County Committee

Southeast Regional and Drugs Task Force

County Heritage Forum

Enniscorthy Town Centre First

Other committees may require community representation in the future.

Each of these committees have their own Terms of Reference/Standing Orders and PPN representatives should familiarise themselves with these.

Conflicts of Interest & Loyalty on Committees of the PPN

- A. Wexford PPN Members should demonstrate transparency in all dealings and act in an honest, fair, and independent way.
- B. Committee members must disclose any conflict of interest or loyalty, be it personal, family, business or otherwise, in relation to a matter to be decided on by the committee.
- C. A conflict of interest arises when private interests compete with a committee members duty to act always in the best interests of the organisation.
- D. A conflict of loyalty is where a committee member is, or is perceived to be, influenced by considerations other than the best interest of the organisation.
- E. Any committee member who feels there is a potential conflict of interest or loyalty that is not being declared should raise this for discussion.
- F. If a disclosure of interest or loyalty is made at a meeting, particulars of the disclosure will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting concerned, and or so long as the matter to which the disclosure related is being dealt with by the meeting, the person by whom the disclosure is made shall not be counted in the quorum for the meeting.
- G. Where a conflict of interest is declared by a member, that member will leave the meeting temporarily and will not be entitled to vote on the matter in which they have an interest. Upon returning to the meeting the member will be notified of the decision by the Chair and no further discussion will take place.
- H. All registered conflicts will be recorded in meeting minutes.

Election Policy of County Wexford Public Participation Network

Introduction: County Wexford Public Participation Network elects' representatives to sit on committees and organisations on behalf of all member organisations of the network.

This policy is provided to outline and document the way in which Co. Wexford PPN nominates and elects its representatives. **Where the Policy Applies:** This election policy will apply for all representations of Co. Wexford PPN, where it is deemed a member should act as the representative. This includes the Secretariat and all other County policy and decision-making committees and boards that use the PPN Network to elect community members. **PPN Representatives Overall Principles:** The following principles apply to all Co Wexford PPN Representative roles both on the PPN Secretariat and other County policy and decision-making committee or board that use the PPN structure to elect community representatives.

- Representatives are nominated and elected by Full member groups of the PPN.
- Nominees should be over 18 years of age.
- Depending on the Board or Committee and the specific seat, there may be a different cohort of member group eligible to make nominations.
- Representatives are elected for a maximum term of three years, unless in exceptional circumstances the Plenary may decide on a shorter term.
- Representatives who are standing down at the end of the first term are eligible for re-election; however, no person is eligible to serve more than two consecutive terms.
- Representatives are nominated by Member Groups following an open and transparent nominations process. If, after a successful election, the original nominating body is dissolved and no longer exists, or the Representative is no longer associated with that nominating body, the Representative will be deemed to have stepped down from the role and a call for nominations will be made.
- County Wexford Public Participation Network strives to achieve a gender balance on the Secretariat and amongst its Representatives.
- In order to preserve the independence of the PPN, current PPN Representatives cannot stand for election to any Government office, local, national, or European, while remaining a Representative of the PPN. Once a Representative decides to run for office, they must immediately notify the PPN in writing.

Please Note: The Election Process Document of 2023 is binding to this constitution and requires ratification at plenary, and also requires a special general meeting for any changes to said Election Process document.

Protecting the Integrity of the PPN

To protect the integrity of the PPN, a disciplinary procedures document will outline the process to be undertaken when an allegation is made that a group is:

- Acting in a manner contrary to the values, aims or objectives of the PPN.
- Failing to comply with the criteria for membership set out in this Constitution. While the disciplinary process is being pursued, voting rights for such groups will be suspended until the issue has been resolved. In line with due process and the disciplinary procedures document, a membership group may be exonerated or removed from the PPN. An appeals process is available.

Wexford PPN logos/branding cannot be used without the written consent of the PPN. It shall be considered gross misconduct leading to immediate suspension to do so without permission.

Amendments to the Constitution

A proposal to make an amendment to a constitution can be made by the Secretariat or by a member group.

Proposed changes to the constitution must be notified in writing to the Resource Worker within 14 days after the receipt of the constitution.

No changes will be accepted after this time. This would then be made available to Plenary members at least 7 days in advance of a Plenary meeting.

Complaints

Complaints can only be dealt with in writing to the Resource worker, using the online 'Complaints Document' on the PPN website. Complaints must be signed by an individual on behalf of a Community Group. The PPN reserve the right to check with the full group members that they are aware of the complaint.