



# Meath Public Participation Network

## Secretariat Terms of Reference

### 1. Background & Overview of the PPN

*The Working Group on Citizen Engagement* was established by the Government in September 2013. The role of this Group was to make recommendations to ensure more extensive and diverse input by citizens into local government. The Group recommended that a “*Public Participation Network*” be established in each local authority area to enable the public to take an active formal role in relevant policy making and committees of the Local Authority”.

In response to this recommendation, Public Participation Networks were set up in each local authority area under Section 46 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014. The aim was to provide a “*framework for public participation in local government by which citizens and communities will be encouraged and supported to participate in the decision-making processes of the local authority*”. In June 2014, the Dept of Environment, Community and Local Government issued guidelines to all Local Authorities on the establishment of PPNs in their areas.

The PPN ensures that Meath communities have a say in how Meath County Council works and provides a new way for the public to engage with the Council. The PPN is the recognised link through which the Council connects with the community/ voluntary, social inclusion & environmental sectors.

## **2. Role of the PPN**

The role of the PPN is:

- a) To contribute to the Council's development plans and to develop a vision for the well-being of present and future generations.
- b) To facilitate opportunities for networking, communication and information sharing between the Council and the community/voluntary, social inclusion and environmental sectors, as well as other agencies/organisations.
- c) To identify issues of collective concern and to work to influence local policy relating to these issues.
- d) To actively support inclusion of socially excluded groups, communities experiencing high levels of disadvantage, discrimination & inequality, and to enable their participation at local level.
- e) To facilitate the selection of representatives from the community/voluntary, social inclusion and environmental sectors onto Council policy-making bodies.
- f) To feed a broad range of ideas, experiences, suggestions and proposals of the PPN into policies and plans being developed by the Local Authority.

## **3. Structure of the Secretariat**

3.1 There are 12 members elected to Meath PPN Secretariat, comprising:

- 1 representative from each of the 6 Municipal Districts.
- 2 representatives from each of the 3 Electoral Colleges (community/voluntary, social inclusion and environmental)

3.2 All members on the Secretariat have equal status.

3.3 The Secretariat has no Chairperson or Secretary. Instead, a Chairperson is appointed to conduct meetings

3.4 Sub-groups of the Secretariat are established, as required, to oversee agreed areas of business. Terms of Reference for sub-groups are developed, as appropriate, by each sub-group. Sub-groups are required to report to the Secretariat on all relevant matters

#### **4. Role of the Secretariat**

The role of the Secretariat is to:

- a) Facilitate the implementation of decisions of the PPN.
- b) Ensure the proper functioning of the PPN and co-ordinate its activities.
- c) Communicate extensively and regularly with all PPN members and disseminate information concerning PPN activities as widely as possible.
- d) Work closely with PPN staff to support them to deliver PPN objectives.
- e) Facilitate the representation of the community, voluntary and environmental sectors on the Local Community Development Committee, the Strategic Policy Committees, the Joint Policing Committee, other local government and local development bodies and any local, regional, national or international body deemed appropriate by the Secretariat.
- f) Oversee the participation of PPN Representatives on their respective committees and ensure a reporting mechanism is in place to feedback to the wider PPN, including the facilitation of Linkage Groups.
- g) Ensure that PPN representatives represent the views, interests and priorities of their Linkage Group/Municipal District/Electoral College and not those of their own group/organisation.

#### **5. Meeting Agenda**

- 5.1 In advance of all meetings, the Resource Worker issues a draft agenda to all Secretariat members for their input.
- 5.2 Member organisations are entitled to request an agenda item
- 5.3 The draft agenda and minutes are distributed by the Resource Worker 5 working days prior to meetings

5.4 The agenda is agreed at the start of each meeting. The standard agenda is:

- i. Appointing a chair for the meeting
  - ii. Attendance/Apologies
  - iii. Minutes and Matters Arising
  - iv. Correspondence
  - v. Reports and updates
  - vi. Finance and Budget Update
  - vii. AOB
- b. Agenda items are:
- i. for information
  - ii. for discussion
  - iii. for decision /ratification

## **6. Minutes**

- 6.1 Minutes are taken by the Resource Worker or, as required, by a nominated Secretariat member on a rotating basis.
- 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 Secretariat using a standard template.

## 7. Meetings

### 7.1 Location and Timing

- a) Meetings are held in Council offices in Navan as appropriate every 6 – 8 weeks. Meeting venues will be decided based on accessibility and cost factors.
- b) Meetings will be held at dates/times suitable for all members generally in the evening.

### 7.2 Meeting Refreshments

Refreshments are provided at meetings. There is reasonable regard for dietary requirements and budgetary restrictions.

### 7.3 Meeting Expenses

Expenses are paid in line with the **MPPN/A/001**: Expense Reimbursement Policy

### 7.4 Meeting Attendance

- a) If a member misses three or more consecutive meetings, and/or attends less than two-thirds of meetings annually, he/she will be asked to consider his/her position.
- b) If it is considered that a member is not participating in a meaningful way, or if absences are deemed to be unreasonable, then he/she will be asked to step down.
- c) Reasonable notified lengthy absences (e.g. due to ill health or family commitment) is considered on a case-by-case basis.
- d) In certain circumstances, tele-conferencing is considered as attendance at meetings.

### 7.5 Quorum

- a) A Secretariat meeting is deemed to have a quorum when attendance of Secretariat members includes one-half plus one of the filled seats.
- b) In situations where a member has notified the Secretariat of a lengthy absence (see 6.5c), the quorum is reduced to reflect this.

## **8. Decision-Making**

9. The ruling body of the PPN is the Plenary. As such, the Secretariat's decision making functions relate to operational, administrative and procedural matters. In this regard, the following applies:
- a) Decisions are made by consensus where possible, or otherwise by majority vote
  - b) The Chair has the casting vote in the event of a tie
  - c) No proxy voting is allowed.

9.1 The Secretariat facilitates the implementation of the decisions of the Plenary in relation to strategic, policy and budgetary matters.

## **10. Membership**

### 10.1 Nominations

- a) Members are nominated by a member organisation, and are selected through an open and transparent election process.
- b) In the event that a nomination is no longer valid (e.g. the nominating body ceases to exist or the member no longer represents it), then the member is deemed to have resigned and an election held to fill the vacant seat

### 10.2 Term

Membership of the Secretariat is for 5 years after which a member can opt to put themselves forward for another term if desired.

### 10.3 Resignation

Resignations must be in writing (by letter or email).

### 10.4 Refilling of Seats

- a) Where possible, vacant seats are filled, within 3 months, by election from relevant Sector/Municipal District.
- b) Where possible, exit interviews are carried out with the member vacating the seat.
- c) A handover to the new member will be given from the member vacating the seat.

### 10.5 Gender

There is a commitment to equality, non-discrimination and strive for gender balance in terms of Secretariat membership.

### 10.6 Code of Conduct

10.6.1 Members are required to comply with the PPN Code of Conduct.

10.6.2 If a member brings the Secretariat 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.

10.6.3 All members of the PPN are expected to act in accordance with the tenets of the PPN. Any failure to do so may result in the member being asked to step down from the Secretariat.

10.6.4 Secretariat members are required to work in the best interest of Meath PPN, rather than in the interest of their Municipal District, Sector or Nominating Body.