

Open Government 3rd National Action Plan

Public Participation Network (PPN)
Strengthening inclusion and civic deliberation in local decision making
(Proposal 26)

Commitment Start and End Date (e.g. 31 August 2021 - 31 August 2023)

<p>Who do you think would be the lead implementing Government Department(s) / agency (if known and any relevant contact details)</p>	<p>Department of Rural and Community Development for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public Participation Networks (PPNs) ▪ Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) <p>Department of Housing Local Government & Heritage for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Other Local Authority Committees' functions, membership and procedures with which the PPNs engage.
<p><i>Objective</i></p>	<p>To further enhance civic representation, engagement and participation, including in the Public Participation Network (PPN) and Strategic Policy Committee (SPCs) in local government decision-making processes.</p>
<p><i>Status Quo</i></p>	<p>Public Participation Networks</p> <p>Section 46 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 commenced on 1 June 2014, provides the legislative basis which gives effect to the Framework for Public Participation and the Public Participation Networks (PPNs).</p> <p>A Public Participation Network (PPN) is a structure that brings together Community and Voluntary, Environmental and Social Inclusion groups in each local authority area. The primary purpose of the PPN is to enable the PPN member groups to input into and have their voices heard within the formal decision making structures of the local authority.</p> <p>The PPNs should have as diverse a membership as possible, which reflects the volunteer-led activity in the Local Authority area and which is socially inclusive.</p> <p>Throughout Local Authorities, public participation must be seen as an important and valued element of policy development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.</p>

In addition, it should be demonstrated that the public's contribution has the potential to meaningfully influence the decisions or outcomes, and the public participation process should communicate to the PPNs how their input affected the decision or outcomes once the decisions are made

Refer to the [Public Participation Network Handbook](#) for the statutory remit and more detail on the purpose and operations of PPNs.

A structural review of the PPNs was undertaken in 2021. The purpose of the review was to:

1. Assess how the existing structure has facilitated the operation of the PPN network to date against the overall objectives as outlined in the 2014 Report of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with local government.
2. Identify opportunities to further strengthening and enhancing PPN structures.
3. Make recommendations as to how to build on existing structural strengths and support the future development of PPNs.

The following are the high level areas that were included in the Review terms of reference:

- Structure and Governance
- Impact of Structure on Strategic Effectiveness
- Impact of Structure on Participation, Engagement and Inclusion
- Effectiveness of "three college" structure and linkage groups
- Administrative Support and Development under the current structure
- Review of National Advisory Group (NAG) structure
- Suitability of PPNs for contributing to climate action and community development.

Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs):

SPCs assist the council in the formulation, development and review of policy; reflecting the major functions or services of a local authority within the broader context.

Each local authority has established SPCs which bring together both elected members and people actively working

	<p>with social, economic, cultural and environmental bodies to develop and review policies related to council services. The SPCs provide elected members with external views as they discharge their strategic role in the development of the local authority, including their policy development and oversight roles.</p> <p>Involving people in making the decisions that affect them and their lives is a core principle of democracy. Real participation goes beyond voting (representative democracy) to a situation where people and government work in partnership to co-create infrastructure and services, solve problems and work towards the well-being of all in this generation and the generations to come (deliberative democracy). By definition, such an approach requires making a specific effort to ensure that the voices and views of people who are not traditionally influential are heard and considered.</p>
Commitment description	
<p>What is the public problem that the commitment will address?</p>	<p>PPNs are a key method under statute for civil society to influence local policy decisions made by Councils¹. PPNs have been operational for five years with significant investment from the Department of Rural and Community Development and local authorities. Given the length of time which has elapsed since their establishment, a review of the PPN structures is timely.</p> <p>(1) There is a need to identify opportunities for further strengthening and enhancing PPN structures, and for recommendations as to how to build on existing structural strengths and best support the future development of PPNs.</p> <p>These may include a coordinated National Executive, along with other national and local support and accountability measures, as identified by PPN reps.</p> <p>The process for identifying the needs of PPN reps and identifying their recommendations will include...</p>

Commented [KM(1)]: To be determined arising from the review – it is not possible to state at this stage if such a structure will be established

Commented [CB(2R1)]: The subgroup discussions acknowledged that consultation and a deliberative process has been undertaken to inform this review. There has also been very specific operational aspects raised.

This text has been sought but can't be agreed. If the draft commitment included one desired outcome but not others, this potentially risks undermining the participative process to date.

Additional text has been added to commitment to capture 'national support structures'.

The Round Table is asked to consider and decide if the commitment can be included in the 3rd National Action Plan without this text?

Commented [KM(3)]: This process will follow from decisions on structure, to be made in coming months – it is not possible to complete the sentence at this time

Commented [CB(4R3)]: As above.

¹ PPNs are one among a suite of ways that citizens and civil society can participate in local decision making, including xxxxxx

	<p>(2) For PPNs to fulfil their potential, it is important the breadth of perspective on societal issues that impact all people is not limited. At present, it is not clear whether there is diversity in representation within PPNs in practice. As a result, an evidence base is required to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. collate data on the demographic characteristics of those involved in PPNs, b. identify demographics with low representation c. identify any barriers that may be preventing certain demographics who wish to participate from doing so d. make recommendations on how barriers to participation can be addressed <p>(3) [Late addition – DHLGH to agree] PPN reps participate in Local Authority Committees, deliberative processes need strengthening along best practice lines to ensure meaningful participation.</p> <p>(4) Engage to explore how current performance reporting could capture the PPN evidence.</p>
<p>What is the commitment?</p>	<p>A: To publish the PPN Structural Review report</p> <p>To publish the PPN Structural Review report which will provide evidence based recommendations on governance and accountability, and national support structures to inform the future DRCD/PPN initiatives arising.</p> <p>B: To develop an evidence base and recommendations on addressing barriers to participation from across all demographics within communities:</p> <p>In order to ensure diverse input by citizens into the decision-making process, it is essential that PPNs represent a range of perspectives from throughout the community sector.</p> <p>DRCD propose to engage consultants to research the current barriers to participation from across all demographics within our communities.</p> <p>The current draft timeframe (subject to resource allocation) is to agree a terms of reference and request for tender to</p>

Commented [CB(5): Secretariat has reached out to DHLGH team bilaterally in relation to this matter. The detail has been shared with the subgroup.

Commented [CB(6): DRCD addition.

	<p>engage consultants in Q2 2022 with a report to be produced by end 2022.</p> <p>The purpose of the research will be to collate data on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> the demographic characteristics of those who currently take an active part in PPN activities, and those who were reps but resigned??? identify demographics with little or no representation, identify any barriers that may be preventing certain demographics who wish to participate from doing so, and make recommendations on how barriers to participation can be addressed. <p>Note: This research should be provided by an organisation with an understanding of structural barriers to inclusion and diversity.</p> <p>C: Review of Strategic Policy Committees (DHLGH):</p> <p>DHLGH is committed to undertaking a review of Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs), which will commence during 2022.</p> <hr/> <p>To be moved into the Participatory Governance Framework in next version:</p> <p>Develop mechanisms to enhance the engagement of marginal groups in local deliberative processes (DRCD):</p> <p>Develop mechanisms to enhance the engagement of marginal groups in local deliberative processes. DRCD have secured Dormant Accounts Funding.</p>
<p>How will the commitment contribute to solving the public problem?</p>	<p>This commitment will generate actionable evidence based recommendations which will be progressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The publication of the structural review of the PPNs, undertaken in 2021, will provide recommendations on governance and accountability, to inform the future DRCD initiatives arising. Via what process? The research report will provide a base line of the PPNs diversity and produce evidence based recommendations to inform the future DRCD/PPN initiatives arising. Research and recommendations will be done by Diversity, Equity and Inclusion experts.

Commented [KM(7)]: This aspect is not currently included in the draft plan for the research

Commented [KM(8)]: The competencies of the selected organisation will be defined in the request for tender. It is too early to stat what those competencies will be.

Commented [CB(9R8)]: Secretariat decision: Given the tendering process required this should not be included.

Commented [KM(10)]: The implementation of recommendations will the normal process of seeking Ministerial approval to implement actions arising from the review

Commented [KM(11)]: The process of selecting suitable consultants to undertake the work has not commenced. It is too early to state what expertise they will be required to have

Commented [CB(12R11)]: Secretariat decision: Given the tendering process required this should not be included.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The review of the Strategic Policy Committees will consult with stakeholders, including the PPN Advisory Group, in drafting the TORs and as part of the review process to generate findings, conclusions and/or recommendations for implementation. Please outline the process briefly.
<i>Describe what the intended impact of successful implementation will be?</i>	Civic society passionately engaged in civic participation, in a manner valued by citizens, Local Authorities and National Government, with clear deliberative, independent processes that reveal innovative solutions to complex social challenges.
<i>Which Open Government value(s) does your commitment relate too?</i>	Civic Participation
<i>Why is (and describe how) this commitment is relevant to the Open Government value(s)?</i>	This commitment will generate actionable evidence based recommendations which will be progressed to further enhance civic participation.
<i>What United Nations Sustainable Development Goal² does this commitment relate too³?</i>	<p><u>Goal 16:</u> Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels</p> <p><u>Sub-goal 16.6:</u> Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels</p>
<i>Additional information (if known)</i>	<p>Programme for Government⁴ commitment – To fully implement Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities, the five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland up to 2024.</p> <p>Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland⁵: Objective 7 - Supporting commitments in Our</p>

Commented [CB(13): Consultation text (lines 2 & 3) now reflected here as well as in the milestone.

As discussed in the subgroup, there is a commitment to undertake this review, resourcing (staff or budget) is being determined. There is a commitment to consultation captured in the draft. No further information is available to be made available at this point. The Round Table may wish to note the Secretariat input on the potential role of monitoring in bridging gap.

² Refer to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/sustainabledevelopmentgoals>

³ Ireland includes this additional information to further enhance the coordination of policy implementation and it is a requirement under Ireland's 2nd Sustainable Development Goal National Implementation Plan 2021-2023 (draft).

⁴ Available at gov.ie - Programme for Government: Our Shared Future (www.gov.ie), page 92.

⁵ Available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/7285e7-minister-ring-publishes-ambitious-five-year-strategy-to-support-the-/>. Specific actions are outlined on page 29.

	Public Service 2020, continue to develop and strengthen Public Participation Networks as the primary mechanism for communities to engage with local government decision-making.		
Commitment milestones			
Suggested next steps and milestones to guide implementation <i>(Don't forget to capture and detail any public facing element desired; e.g. stakeholder engagement)</i>	Who / What organisation <i>(if known)</i>	When <i>(if known)</i>	Additional info.
Review findings of the Mazars independent report	PPN Oversight Group	Q1 2022	PPN National Secretariat subgroup would like input
Approval of next steps by DRCD Management Board and Minister	DRCD	Q2 2022	
Finalise terms of reference to address barriers to participation.	DRCD	Q2 2022	
Finalise research on barriers to participation	DRCD	Q4 2022	
Commence the Review of the Strategic Policy Committee during 2022 and to consult with stakeholders, including the PPN Advisory Group, in drafting the TORs and as part of the review process ⁶ .	DHLGH	Q4 2022	

Commented [CB(14): This group is already established. This issue has been discussed in the subgroup, which includes DRCD who have ownership of this process.

Contact information	
Lead contact name (required)	Ciara Bates (Department Rural and Community Development) in relation to commitment (A) & (B). Diarmuid O'Leary (Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage) in relation to commitment (C).
Organisation (if applicable)	Department Rural and Community Development (DRCD)

⁶ As funding/resource allocation is awaited, no further milestones possible at this stage.

		Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH)
Role title (if applicable)		DRCD, Principal Officer, Community and Voluntary Supports and Programmes DHLGH, Principal Officer, Local Governance and Elected Members
Email and Phone (required)		Ciara.Bates@drcd.gov.ie Diarmuid.OLeary@housing.gov.ie
Special interest and/or policy area of expertise (optional)		
Other Actors Involved	Government Ministries, Department/Agency	
	CSOs, private sector, multilaterals, working groups	Public Participation Network, <u>National Secretariat of PPN-</u>