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## The 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. Many of the PPN Workers are also employed by the Local Authority. 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.

Each PPN and Local Authority should draw up a clear Memorandum of Understanding to govern the operations and funding of the PPN, and to provide clarity on the boundaries of each party (see sample Memorandum of Understanding at Appendix 13).

Key issues to be covered in the Memorandum of Understanding are that:

- PPNs are independent from the Local Authority, i.e. neither the PPN as a whole or the PPN Workers are answerable to the Local Authority in the carrying out their PPN work.
- Each Local Authority has a responsibility to support the PPN to maintain its independence and to ensure that it maintains appropriate boundaries. This is particularly the case where the PPN Workers are employed by the Local Authority.
- Throughout the Local Authority, public participation must be seen as an important and valued element of policy development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This cannot be solely confined to the Community Section.
- The proper procedure is followed when submitting reports or returns concerning the PPN.

All Local Authority staff, but particularly those in direct contact with the PPN, should receive induction training so that they are familiar with the PPN structures and Workplan. Training should also be made available to elected representatives (i.e. councillors, TDs) so that they are more informed about the roles, functions and activities of PPNs.

To make sure that the PPN runs smoothly and to develop the relationship between the PPN and the Local Authority, it is recommended that the relevant personnel from both the PPN and the Local Authority meet at least twice per year to discuss areas of mutual interest and concern.

## The PPN Budget

The initial annual allocation to each PPN from the Department of Rural and Community Development was €50,000, to be matched with at least €30,000 by the Local Authority. In recent years, additional allocation has been made by the Department of Rural and Community Development to fund an additional Support Worker post. It is expected that the Local Authority will supplement the Department's allocation with an additional funding allocation in accordance with Departmental Circular CVSP 2/2019.

Local Authorities are co-funders of the PPN. The PPN is accountable to the Local Authority in the spending of public money. This means that the PPN budget can only be used to support the work of the PPN in accordance with the PPN objectives, the PPN Constitution, its Workplan, its Strategic Plan and Departmental Circulars. It does not entitle the Local Authority to prior approval of expenditure items, otherwise than in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding between the PPN and the Local Authority, if applicable.

**The funding allocation in respect of the Resource Worker and additional funding allocation for the recruitment of the Support Worker must be ring-fenced by the PPN and not used for any other purposes.**



While it may be administered by another body, this budget must be under the control of the PPN. The PPN is also free to apply for further grants and funding to support additional pieces of work that are in line with the PPN Workplan. Where the PPN funding is being held in a bank account operated by the Local Authority, the Local Authority may ask for expenditures to be vouched by the PPN in accordance with the standard financial procedures in place in that Local Authority. The Local Authority cannot request information outside of these financial operating procedures or look to influence how the PPN spends its budget. Where a dispute arises, it will be referred to mediation with each of the PPN and the Local Authority paying for all associated costs equally from within their own resources.

The Memorandum of Understanding sets out the terms under which the PPN and Local Authority will work together. There may be circumstances in which the Local Authority may have additional requests for the PPN and vice versa. Fulfilling these requests will be a matter for the PPN / Local Authority concerned, having an awareness of the current workload of each and their respective Workplans. Neither the Local Authority nor the PPN are permitted to request a fee for these additional requests.

Where the PPN is hosted by a third party Host Organisation, the Local Authority will enter into a Service Level Agreement with that Host Organisation, setting out the terms and conditions attached to the provision of funding by the Local Authority to the Host Organisation in respect of the PPN. In some cases, the Local Authority will also enter into a Service Level Agreement directly with the PPN.

Sample Service Level Agreements are set out in Appendix 15.

## PPN Staff and Recruitment

When it comes to the recruitment and selection of all PPN Workers, the PPN Secretariat and, where appropriate, the Resource Worker, should be fully involved in a clear and transparent process that is appropriate to meet the requirements of the individual PPN and the associated job description.

Acknowledging that PPN Workers might be employed by a number of different stakeholders and, depending on their employment contract, have a mix of permanent and temporary contracts, it is recommended that Resource Workers and Support Workers are engaged to work with the PPN, subject to annual funding allocations, for a minimum period of 3 years. This does not exclude the PPN Workers from taking advantage of other career opportunities should they present themselves and be of interest to the PPN Workers.

In many cases, the PPN Workers were recruited and employed by the Local Authority. On the establishment of the PPN, these Workers were assigned to work for the PPN, often continuing to work in the same area as their former colleagues. This can understandably cause confusion and PPN Workers can sometimes be asked to do work on behalf of the Local Authority outside the scope of their current job description (as Resource Worker or Support Worker). It is essential that the boundaries of this assignment, and the independence of the PPNs, are respected by all. The PPN has a large volume of work and the PPN Workers must be allowed to dedicate their time to that work in accordance with their roles.

Continuity is important for the PPN to function properly, as much of the work is based on forming relationships and building networks. Unless otherwise requested by the PPN Worker, the Local Authority should do its best, subject to annual funding allocations, to make sure that the PPN Workers remain in their role and are not reassigned within the Local Authority for a minimum of 3 years. If opportunities become available to the PPN Worker through the Local Authority, they may choose to avail of them through the usual open contest.

## Local Authority Boards and Committees

When a Board or Committee seeks a Representative, they should contact the PPN Secretariat with the following details:

- Title of Board or Committee
- Function and scope of the Board or Committee
- The existing Board or Committee members
- The commitment expected from a PPN Representative e.g. time and location of meetings, participation in subgroups, becoming a company director etc.
- What skill set(s) they would like the Representative to have. (Note: these cannot be overly restrictive e.g. “an interest in and knowledge of issues impacting on people in poverty” would be acceptable, whereas “be a qualified social care professional” may not.)
- What expenses are payable.
- Any restrictions on membership of the Board or Committee e.g. not being an employee or member of an organisation funded directly by the Board or Committee (conflict of interest), or not being a member of another nominating sector e.g. farming, which already has representation on the Board or Committee, or coming from a particular geographical area or type of organisation. For example, a Local Link could seek a Representative from each Municipal District in a Local Authority area; a Sports Partnership could seek Representatives from different target groups e.g. older people, people with a disability etc.
- Any potential conflict of interest which could impact on a Representative’s full participation on the Board or Committee.
- Any other relevant matters.

### Rights and Responsibilities of Boards and Committees

The way in which the Committee conducts its business has a huge impact on the effectiveness of PPN representation. An open facilitative style can make it easy for all members to participate and contribute. The following rights and responsibilities are generally within the remit of the Chair or Chief Officer (or equivalent).

#### *Responsibilities of the Board or Committee*

- To draw up and communicate clear terms of reference and procedures / standing orders and a vision for the Board or Committee.
- To hold regular meetings at times, dates and locations that facilitate, as far as possible, the participation of volunteers. Ideally these dates should be set for the calendar year.
- To hold an induction meeting and have an induction pack for new members

- to explain the processes and procedures of the Board or Committee.
- To set the agenda in consultation with members and to enable members to put items on the agenda.
  - To give at least one month's notice of meetings and to circulate the agenda and any documentation for reading at a minimum of two weeks in advance of meetings. This is to allow PPN Representatives to consult with their Linkage / Thematic Group before the meeting and to make sure that PPN Representatives have enough information to make informed comments and decisions.
  - To chair the meeting in an open and transparent way. To enable and value the contribution of all members and foster a culture of active listening. This should include giving enough time for discussion and deliberation of agenda items, and if required setting up subgroups to bring recommendations to the main Board or Committee. Decisions should be made in an open and transparent way.
  - To make sure that any conflicts of interest are clearly stated and dealt with appropriately.
  - To include all points of discussion within the minutes insofar as possible and within the limits of confidentiality and data protection. This does not mean that every word discussed is minuted, but that every discussion point is properly noted.
  - To produce an Agreed Outcomes Statement or minute at the end of each meeting which can be shared with the Linkage / Thematic Group.
  - To pay travel and other expenses to PPN Representatives in a timely manner and in accordance with the Local Authority's standard Travel and Expenses policy (a copy of which should form part of the Representative's induction pack).
  - To offer relevant training to all members and to provide support to members in understanding technical documents.
  - To review the workings of the Board or Committee on a regular basis and to consider any recommendations made following this review.

### *Obligations of PPN Representatives as members of LA Boards and Committees*

- Members will attend meetings, or assign an alternate (where possible) to attend in their place.
- Members will prepare thoroughly for meetings, and contribute fully.
- Members will feed back to their PPN Linkage / Thematic Groups and take direction from them.
- Members will play a full role in the workings of the Board or Committee including participation in subgroups, consultations etc.
- Members will be open and honest in their dealings with the Board or Committee, declaring any conflicts of interest.

## The Vision for Community Wellbeing and the Local Authority

The Vision for Community Wellbeing is intended to set out a vision for the wellbeing of the local community for this and future generations. It is developed in consultation with Member Groups following an extensive and comprehensive consultation process. A number of PPNs have already developed their Visions for Community Wellbeing and are using these to inform their work in consultations and Representative inputs. As such, this is a key part of the work of the PPNs.

The process for developing the Vision for Community Wellbeing (the Vision) involves consultations with Member Groups, online consultations, drafting and revisions before a final, robust document can be delivered which truly reflects the views of the PPN.

The Vision consists of six domains:

- Health (Physical and Mental)
- Economy and Resources
- Social and Community Development
- Participation, Democracy and Good Governance
- Values, Culture and Meaning
- Environment and Sustainability

Given the diversity involved, and the extent of the consultations, the Vision can provide a template to feed in to the Local Economic and Community Plans for each Local Authority area. The Local Authority should work with the PPN after the development of its Vision to collaborate on consultations which align to the Vision so as to minimise duplication of effort and “consultation fatigue”.

## Independence and Accountability

Although working closely with the Local Authority, the PPN is a distinct and independent network. Maintaining this independence is critical to the integrity of the PPN and to the trust of its Member Groups. The PPN and the Local Authority will develop and maintain a good working relationship along the lines detailed in this Section.

As a co-funder, the Local Authority is a key stakeholder in the PPNs and the PPN is accountable to the Local Authority in respect of the financial governance in the spending of public monies.

## Dispute Resolution

All disputes between the PPN and the Local Authority should be resolved locally in a manner which reflects the working relationship between the PPN and Local Authority and respects the independence of each.

Any dispute between the PPN and the Local Authority which cannot be resolved locally will be referred to mediation to be facilitated by an independent mediator. The mediator will be chosen by agreement between the Secretariat and the Local Authority. If no agreement can be reached in respect of a mediator, the Department of Rural and Community Development will appoint an independent mediator. This will also apply to the appointment of any replacement mediator where the original mediator is conflicted from acting or cannot act for any other reason. In the case of mediation, the Local Authority and PPN will each pay half of the mediation costs and associated expenses, i.e. the PPN will pay its share of mediation costs and expenses from within its own budget and the Local Authority will pay its share from within its own resources. The Local Authority cannot deduct this amount from its allocation to the PPN.

Where no agreement can be reached, the Department of Rural and Community Development will make a determination on the matter which will be binding on both the PPN and the Local Authority.

