



Sligo Public Participation Network

Líonra rann Pháirtíochta Poiblí Chontae Sligigh

Constitution

Proposed for adoption on 29th November 2022

Acronyms

PPN Public Participation Network

MD Municipal District

AM Annual Meeting

DEFINITIONS

Electoral College: Sligo PPN has three electoral colleges, Community and Voluntary, Social Inclusion and Environmental. A registered group may join *one* Electoral College as long as that College reflects the primary aim of the group. Currently all colleges elect representatives onto the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC).

Linkage Group: This is a group formed by the PPN to research and advise on specific areas of interest. Sligo PPN has one linkage group – the Heritage Linkage Group

Interest Group: These are groups formed around a common interest across the three different colleges. They are brought together by member groups and supported by relevant reps

Representative: This is a person elected to a county- wide committee. They are there to act on behalf of the community sector they represent.

Secretariat: This is a group of 9 people, elected by the PPN Membership, to coordinate the activities of the PPN. They are made up of 2 Environment Reps, 2 Social Inclusion Reps, 2 Community & Voluntary Reps and 1 Rep from each MD

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1. Introduction

The Sligo Public Participation Network is a county wide network that facilitates people from the community, voluntary and environmental sectors to participate in local decision making structures. It is 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).

2. Objectives

The PPN works with the community, voluntary and environmental sectors to build their capacity to inform the future development of our county. We do this by;

- 2.1 Encouraging and enabling participation in local decision making and planning of services
- 2.2 Facilitating opportunities for networking, communication and the sharing of information both across communities and between the community sector and Sligo County Council
- 2.3 Strengthening the capacity of groups to contribute positively to the community
- 2.4 Identifying issues of collective concern and using the PPN structure to influence policy and planning in relation to these issues
- 2.5 Acknowledging and promoting the contribution that our member groups make to society
- 2.6 Constantly working to ensure that our network represents and celebrates the increasingly diverse nature of the Sligo community. We will prioritise capturing the voice of those who may not have traditionally engaged in public participation such as new communities, asylum seekers and refugees, young people and members of our LGBTQ+ community.
- 2.7 Taking an active and formally recognised role in policy making and oversight committees of the Sligo Local authority.
- 2.8 Ensuring clear and transparent mechanisms for the selection of members from the local community to participate in policy making fora and facilitating elections onto decision making bodies
- 2.9 Supporting individual members of the PPN to develop their capacity to do their own work effectively and also participate effectively in the activities of the PPN
- 2.10 Acting as the vehicle to gather feedback and input into policies and plans being developed by our Local Authority, reflecting both areas of disagreement and, where there is no consensus, the range of views.
- 2.11 Working to affect national and regional policies in collaboration with other PPNs.

3. Values and Principles

Sligo PPN will adhere to the following values and principles

- 3.1 Be inclusive of all groups and value diversity
- 3.2 Be participatory in its approach
- 3.3 Work in a collaborative, transparent and fair way
- 3.4 Act as an independent body
- 3.5 Adhere to the principles of good governance and be accountable to our members

Governance Structures

4. Structure of the PPN

The Sligo PPN is organised at County and MD level

Our PPN will have;

- A County ANNUAL MEETING which deals with county level issues
- Municipal District Meetings, when called by local PPN MD representatives, which deal with issues at MD level.
- A Secretariat at county level to manage the day to day operation of the PPN
- A Linkage group around Heritage
- Interest groups around specific shared areas of interest

5. County Membership

- 5.1 Sligo PPN membership refers to all registered member groups of the PPN
- 5.2 The Sligo PPN will hold an Annual Meeting (Plenary) at least once a year for all members. Notice will be given no less than 3 weeks before the Annual Meeting via appropriate means.
The member groups will adhere to the objectives set out in section 8
- 5.3 All member groups will opt to be a member of a voluntary, social inclusion or environmental college.
- 5.4 Each membership organisation will normally have one vote under the PPN election process, except for those groups affiliated to a national organisation when only one vote per organisation applies
- 5.5 A special meeting of all member groups can be called if requested by two thirds of membership groups by petition of members or if agreed by Secretariat majority
- 5.6 The PPN membership approves and adopts any amendments to the PPN Constitution as recommended by the PPN Secretariat.

Decision Making Powers of the PPN Members

- 5.7 The collective membership of the PPN delegates the day to day running of the PPN to the Secretariat, including all operational and financial decisions
- 5.8 The Secretariat hosts the election process for PPN members to be nominated to key committees, such as the LCDC, through the electoral colleges. Election processes may take place at the plenary meeting or online.
- 5.9 All eligible PPN member groups have the opportunity to vote in these elections
- 5.10 The full membership hosts elections to the Secretariat every 3 years

Procedures for the ANNUAL MEETING / plenary of all PPN Members

- 5.11 An ANNUAL MEETING shall be deemed valid if at least 15 Member Organisations are represented, a minimum of 4 of Secretariat members are present, and a minimum of 21 days' notice of the meeting has been given.
- 5.12 The Secretariat of County Sligo Public Participation Network will call at least one Plenary Meeting, open to all member groups, each year. This should be not later than 15 months from the preceding County Plenary. The County Plenary is the main decision making body of the Public Participation Network. Election decisions made between Plenary meetings must be presented for ratification to the following meeting of the Plenary. Each full Member Group has one vote in the Plenary.
 - Member Organisations should be given at least 21 days' notice of a Plenary Meeting via email or social media channels.
 - Notice of a Plenary Meeting should include details of any elections that will be taking place.
 - Registration for meetings is mandatory and includes registration by members, Secretariat members and staff
 - The quorum for a Plenary Meeting shall be at least 15 Member Organisations and also at least four of those present are members of the Secretariat.

If through registrations, a quorum is not reached, 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 persons 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.

An Extraordinary Plenary Meeting (EPM) may be called by the Secretariat or by notice in writing by 10 Full Member Organisations. At least 14 days' notice shall be given of an Extraordinary Plenary and the notice must contain a specification of the business to be discussed at the meeting.

5.13 Failure to hold Plenary Meetings

In the event that the PPN has not held a Plenary meeting in good time and the term of office of the Secretariat has expired, the outgoing Secretariat will be permitted to continue in a caretaker role for a period of no more than six (6) months to ensure the smooth operation of the PPN provided always that the Secretariat ensure that valid Plenary meeting is held before the expiry of their term as caretaker.

- 5.14 If considered appropriate by the Secretariat, a non-member may be invited to attend a meeting and speak on a specific agenda item
- 5.15 Motions for discussion should be submitted to the Secretariat 7 days before the Annual Meeting (Plenary) by any registered member of the PPN
- 5.16 Decisions of the PPN membership will be made by taking a vote. Decisions will be carried by a simple majority of all members present.
- 5.17 In the event that there is a tie in a vote, the Secretariat chairperson acting on the night will have the casting vote. The chairperson will act in accordance with the agreed view of the wider Secretariat.

6 Municipal District Meeting

- 6.1 As well as the County ANNUAL MEETING, the PPN Secretariat also have the scope to organise a meeting in each Municipal District each year. The meeting will be called, organised and coordinated by the relevant MD Rep with support from the Secretariat. Invitations will be extended to all registered members (i.e. of the Community, Environmental and Voluntary electoral colleges) in the Municipal District.

Each member organisation may select two people to represent them at the meeting of the Municipal District PPN.

- 6.2 Outcomes from the Municipal District meeting will be reported to the County Annual Meeting
- 6.3 The Municipal District meeting can develop and submit policy proposals as agreed by their membership.

7 PPN Secretariat

The Secretariat shall....

- 7.1 Act as the governing body for the PPN
- 7.2 Be made up of 2 members from each of the electoral colleges and one from each municipal district and be elected by the full PPN ANNUAL MEETING
- 7.3 Facilitate the implementation of decisions made at the ANNUAL MEETING by the full membership
- 7.4 Act as the oversight body of the PPN and facilitate the PPN's day to day

business

- 7.5 Facilitate and monitor effective communication between member groups and PPN representatives to ensure quality input into decision-making structures
- 7.6 Ensure procedures for elections are adhered to
- 7.7 Act as a support to representatives and coordinate adequate training to ensure they can fulfil the role assigned to them
- 7.8 Develop and oversee a work-plan for the PPN and carry out reviews as appropriate
- 7.9 Undertake staff management responsibilities and agree, in partnership with PPN staff, the general operation and key project deliverables within the annual workplan

Decision Making Powers of the Secretariat

- 7.10 The Secretariat can make all decisions in relation to the effective day to day running of the PPN.
- 7.11 The Secretariat shall establish appropriate sub-committees/task groups or other sub-structures to effectively carry out their functions.
- 7.12 The Secretariat shall manage and monitor the budget of the PPN
- 7.13 The Secretariat will agree and oversee the implementation of the work plan with the local authority and review it regularly
- 7.14 The Secretariat will develop a communications policy
- 7.15 The Secretariat should appoint and manage staff for the PPN and, at a minimum be involved in all PPN staffing change decisions
- 7.16 The Secretariat maintains the County Register of all membership groups Utilising the Salesforce system. The contents of this register are owned by the PPN.

Procedures for Meetings of the Secretariat

- 7.17 The Secretariat shall hold a minimum of 4 meetings per year. Attendance records shall be kept at meetings of the Secretariat and work reported to the Plenary annually.
- 7.18 The Secretariat operate under a flat structure. There is a rotating appointed chair for each meeting decided by the members of the Secretariat. The appointed chairperson for individual meetings will liaise with staff to set the agenda for subsequent Secretariat meetings.
- 7.19 The quorum for all meetings of the Secretariat shall be one third plus 1 of all Secretariat members.
- 7.20 Notice for meetings along with agenda should be circulated to Secretariat members prior to the date of the meeting.
- 7.21 All Secretariat members can suggest items for the agenda
- 7.22 All Secretariat members must notify of their intention to attend each Secretariat meeting 7 days prior to the meeting taking place

- 7.23 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
- 7.24 In the case of a tied vote the nominated Chairperson for the meeting will hold the casting vote
- 7.25 In the event of a member of the Secretariat failing to attend three consecutive meetings of the Secretariat of which s/he has been properly notified, without sending apologies prior to the meeting, s/he will be deemed to have resigned from the Secretariat.
- 7.26 The Secretariat of the PPN will remain in place for a period of 3 years.
- 7.27 Elections will be held every three years, where all members of the Secretariat will retire their seats. A retiring Secretariat member, shall be eligible for re-election, however no Secretariat member will serve for period of more than 3 consecutive terms.

Functioning Secretariat

- 7.28 In the event that a Secretariat is no longer acting in the best interests of the PPN and in accordance with this Handbook, a request can be made to the Department for Rural and Community Development, signed on behalf of no fewer than 25% of member groups, to allow an emergency election to take place to replace the current Secretariat.

The request to the Department of Rural and Community Development must set out the steps taken by the PPN to address issues with the Secretariat, including dates and times of communications and meetings.

If the Department of Rural and Community Development is satisfied that all reasonable steps have been taken to resolve the issue and either:

1. The issue cannot be resolved with the current Secretariat; or
2. The current Secretariat has not engaged appropriately with attempts to resolve the issue,

the Department of Rural and Community Development will authorise an emergency election to replace the current Secretariat.

PPN Membership

8 Criteria for Group Membership of the PPN

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

- 8.1 Groups are not-for-profit and operate within the community, voluntary and environmental sectors
- 8.1 Have more than five (5) members
- 8.2 Have a written constitution (operating rules & procedures and/or memorandum & articles of association) and a formal structure (eg Chairperson, Secretary or Equivalent)
- 8.3 Be a minimum of six months in existence and currently active
- 8.4 Be open and proactive in engaging new members
- 8.5 Be broadly representative and accountable
- 8.6 Hold an Annual Meeting and have regular meetings
- 8.7 Be non-party political, anti-sectarian and non discriminatory (religious groups are permitted to join the PPN as long as their community activities are open to non or other faith members)
- 8.8 Be independent, with a committee or board (not a substructure or subcommittee)
- 8.9 Groups must be able to establish their bona fides as a community or voluntary organisation and provide documentation if requested to do so.
- 8.10 Groups are required to renew their membership every two years

Criteria for PPN Representatives

- 8.11 A PPN Member who intends to run for public office must declare their interest and, on formal nomination, step down from the PPN for the period of the elections.
- 8.12 Any candidate who runs for public office, regardless of success, must wait one year from the time of elections to return to the PPN if not elected.

8.13 Associate Members

Many PPNs have established Associate Memberships for those groups interested in connecting with the PPN and hearing about the work we do, who do not meet the above criteria. Associate members will receive information and communications from the PPN and will be eligible to attend training and events. Associate members WILL NOT be eligible to either nominate people for representative positions or take part in PPN elections. Examples of our current Associate members include:- Alcohol Forum IMPACT, Bróga Bríomhar Dance School, Easkey Mental Health, First Light

9 Electoral Colleges

- 9.1 When joining the PPN, membership groups must opt to be a part of one of three electoral colleges within the PPN: Environment, Social Inclusion or Community & Voluntary
- To join the Social Inclusion Electoral College an organisation's primary objectives and activities must focus on social inclusion / social justice / equality.
 - 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 Environmental Pillar at a national level
 - Organisations whose primary objectives are other than those listed above will be members of the Voluntary Electoral College.
- 9.2 Each college chooses two people to represent them on the PPN Secretariat.
- 9.3 Each college elects members from among their own college members to represent them on the County's Local Community Development Committee (LCDC).
- 9.4 Members are to be nominated to the LCDC from the PPN (two from the Community and Voluntary College, two from the Social Inclusion College and one from the Environment College).
- 9.5 All nominees who put themselves forward for election must adhere to the charter for representative

Committees and PPN Representatives

10 Conflicts of Interest on Committees of the PPN

- 10.1 Members should demonstrate transparency in all dealings and act in an honest, fair and independent way.
- 10.2 Committee members must disclose any conflict of interest, be it personal, family, business or otherwise, in relation to any initiative taken by the committee.
- 10.3 A conflict of interest can be related to personal, family or business matters, and may be associated with the member or anyone connected with the member benefitting directly or indirectly from activities of the committee.
- 10.4 If a disclosure of interest 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.

- 10.5 Where a conflict of interest is declared by a member, that member will leave the meeting 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. All registered conflicts will be recorded in the minutes.

11 Elections of representatives to County Structures

- 11.1 When a position becomes available for a PPN representative on a county structure/committee, and no substitute exists, the Secretariat will be responsible for deciding on the most appropriate way to fill the vacancy. Options available to them include; hosting a full election across all members, conducting an election through a specific college, co-opting or leaving the seat empty until the next full election cycle.
- 11.2 In all elections of PPN representatives, care will be taken to ensure gender balance and geographical spread of representatives.
- 11.3 Staff and Members of the local authority cannot be nominated through this process.
- 11.4 If anyone nominated through this process subsequently decides to enter electoral politics he/she must immediately resign their PPN representative role and the substitute from the relevant nominating PPN unit (Electoral College / Linkage Group) will replace them. If no substitute is available refer to 11.1
- 11.5 A person who has been an elected representative of any level of Government (local or national) should not be chosen to represent PPN in any representative role for at least one year after completing their term of office.
- 11.6 Employees/professionals, where there is a conflict of interest, cannot be nominated.
- 11.7 The validity of nominations will be decided by the Secretariat against PPN membership criteria.
- 11.8 All PPN representatives should be guided by the Representatives' Charter and any criteria laid down by the unit that nominates them to their representative role.
- 11.9 A retiring representative who is required to step down will be eligible for re-election, however no representative can serve a term of more than 3 full consecutive terms.

12 Nomination Procedures

- 12.1 Groups registered with the Sligo PPN will be invited to participate in nomination and election procedures. Processes regarding nomination and election to roles will be decided by the PPN Secretariat for individual opportunities.

Nomination to Secretariat

- 12.2 For the purposes of the election to the Secretariat, each PPN membership group is entitled to nominate one person for their municipal district and one person for their electoral college.
- 12.3 Nomination forms must be fully completed, by an officer of the nominating group, to be eligible for inclusion in the election or assessment by relevant panels/boards
- 12.4 A returning officer, selected by Sligo PPN Secretariat will decide on the validity of the nomination form in terms of PPN eligibility and their decision is final.
- 12.5 Nomination forms must be submitted online via a link sent to each PPN member, or another method as decided by the PPN Secretariat
- 12.6 Where the same person is nominated for an Electoral College and a Municipal District, they will be asked to identify which position they prefer. No candidate can contest two seats.

13 Voting Procedures

- 13.1 Election and voting procedures undertaken by Sligo PPN may be either online or in person at the Annual Meeting.
- 13.2 Nomination and election procedures will be issued by the PPN unit acting on behalf of the Secretariat before each election. Members will have a mechanism to appeal procedures.
- 13.3 All fully completed nominations received by the closing date, which are deemed eligible, will be put forward for the election
- 13.4 Voting options will be issued to the person nominated to represent the group
- 13.5 If elections are due to take place at a meeting and the named representative cannot attend, they can name an alternate. They must inform the PPN office of the name of the alternate at least one day prior to the election.
- 13.6 Each eligible individual can vote on behalf of **one** organisation only. If an individual is nominated to vote on behalf of another organisation they must ensure that a committee member of that organisation is present at any meeting where an election is taking place for the purposes of voting.
- 13.7 If it is impossible for the PPN group's representative to attend a meeting where elections are taking place, they should indicate that they require a postal vote by 10 days before the election. This request will then be considered by the PPN unit.
- 13.8 If attending a meeting where elections are taking place, all representatives should have a picture ID with them. (Drivers license, Passport, Student ID). When they present their ID, they will receive voting papers for their specified Municipal District, Electoral College or Linkage Group where appropriate.
- 13.9 When an election occurs at a meeting, voting will take place at a specified time during the meeting. Counting of votes will proceed immediately thereafter

- 13.10 Officers will be appointed by Sligo PPN Secretariat to oversee the election and count the ballot papers.
- 13.11 Where the number of candidates nominated equals the number of seats, these candidates will be automatically deemed elected.
- 13.12 Voting will take place in accordance with a proportional representational system.
- 13.13 Where the number of candidates exceeds the number of seats, the person(s) who receives the highest number of first preference votes will be deemed elected, taking into consideration measures to ensure gender balance and a geographic spread of candidates, as appropriate.
- 13.14 In the event that that a clear preference is not indicated on a ballot sheet, it will be deemed a spoiled vote and will not be counted.
- 13.15 In the event of a tie, the successful candidate will be determined by lot. The names of tied candidates will put in a hat. The first name drawn out will be deemed to be elected. If there are two seats the first two names drawn out will be deemed elected.
- 13.16 Nominated delegates who are unsuccessful will be deemed 'substitute members' in the event that the successful nominee resigns her or his seat over the lifetime of the Secretariat. The unsuccessful nominee with the highest number of votes will be the first substitute; the second highest number of votes will be second substitute and so on
Appeals on the nomination and or election process should be made in writing to the PPN Secretariat
- 13.17 Where the number of candidates does not meet the number of seats then the decision goes to the Secretariat with regard to the best course of action to fill any vacancy, this may include offering the seat to a member of an alternative college, or allowing existing representatives to take up more than one seat.

INTEGRITY AND CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

14 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 ...

- a. Acting in a manner contrary to the values, aims or objectives of the PPN.
- Or**
- b. Failing to comply with the criteria for membership set out in section 4 of this Constitution.

While the disciplinary process is being pursued, voting rights for 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 to groups.

15 Amendments to the Constitution

- 15.1 Amendments to the 'Constitution' shall be decided by a two-thirds majority of all members, either at the ANNUAL MEETING or by email distribution. When amendments are proposed at the Annual Meeting, members will have 14 days to raise objections before taken as adopted.

Proposals to amend the Constitution should be submitted to the Secretariat in writing within 14 days of the ANNUAL MEETING and made available to all registered members at least 7 days in advance of the ANNUAL MEETING