

# 7 The PPN Workers



Every PPN has a Resource Worker (although different titles may apply in different PPNs, the term 'Resource Worker' is used throughout this Handbook). The role of the Resource Worker is to support the Secretariat and the Plenary and to carry out duties and tasks on behalf of the PPN following the PPN Workplan. Since 2019, the Resource Worker in most PPNs is also supported in their work by a Support Worker. The Resource Workers and Support Workers (collectively, the PPN Workers) can be employed by the Local Authority, the Hosting Organisation or by a special-purpose PPN Support Company.

The day to day activities of the PPN Workers are facilitated and enabled by the Secretariat on behalf of the Plenary. In doing so, it is important that good HR practices are followed.



**A Staff Liaison Committee must be established, made up of three members of the Secretariat, to directly engage with the PPN Workers and support them in their role. The members of this Staff Liaison Committee must receive HR training before taking up their position on the Staff Liaison Committee.**

Regardless of how the PPN Workers are employed, they work on behalf of the PPN only and should familiarise themselves with the policies and procedures applicable to their PPN.

Some PPN Workers employed by the Local Authority may have a line management structure within that Local Authority. As the PPN is independent of the Local Authority in the performance of its role, any line management structure should be limited to HR issues and cannot impact on or influence the operation of the PPN or the performance by the PPN Workers of their PPN duties. For the duration of any assignment to the PPN, PPN workers must not be assigned or asked to undertake duties outside of this role without prior consultation and agreement of the PPN.

Where the PPN takes on trainees, Tús workers or other Scheme workers, they must make sure that these workers have access to training and capacity building opportunities in their role, are fully aware of the policies and procedures operated by the PPN and are supported in their work.



## The Role of the PPN Worker

The roles of the Resource Worker and Support Worker are as set out in their job descriptions.

The main functions of the Workers are to support the:

- development of the Strategic Plan
- promotion of the PPN
- the capacity building, networking and information provision needs of PPN Member Groups
- PPN Representatives on Boards and Committees
- PPN Secretariat
- PPN to liaise with the Local Authority to further the PPN agenda
- PPN work at a national level

### Development of the Strategic Plan

Each PPN should have a Strategic Plan in place that covers a period, subject to annual funding allocations, of three to five years. This Strategic Plan should be developed by the Member Groups of the PPN; written up by the Secretariat and Workers; and approved by the Plenary.

### Promotion of the PPN

The PPN should proactively promote the benefits of community representation on Boards and Committees. The PPN Workers play a key role in this promotion.

### Provision of Support to Member Groups

#### *Maintaining the Membership Database*

The day to day operation of the Membership Database may be delegated by the Secretariat to the PPN Workers. The Secretariat must make sure that the PPN Workers are provided with training in respect on how to operate the database used to manage PPN membership, on data protection to make sure that their use of the database complies with the law, and make sure that Data Protection Guidelines are in place.

#### *Training and Capacity Building*

A key support provided by the PPNs is the provision of training and capacity building opportunities to Member Groups. The PPN Workers should develop and circulate a Training Needs Analysis to the PPN Member Groups to establish what training needs

they may have at least every two years. This Training Needs Analysis should focus on the main objective of the PPN – the needs of the Member Groups to allow them to participate in local policy decision-making. The PPN Workers may also become aware, through the course of their work, of other training needs that the Member Groups might have.

The PPN Workers should try to source training and capacity building opportunities for Member Groups based on a training budget agreed during the development of the PPN Workplan and approved by the Plenary. Training should be free or low-cost to Member Groups. The PPN is not responsible for meeting all training needs identified by its Member Groups. There are a range of training programmes on offer within the Community and Voluntary, Social Inclusion and Environmental sectors.

### *Information Provision*

The provision of information and support on areas of relevance to the Member Groups is one of the main reasons a group may become a member in the first place. Information on funding opportunities will be of particular interest to Member Groups.

As the main contact points, the PPN Workers will be likely to receive this information first and must distribute it to the PPN Member Groups in a timely manner.

To support Member Group engagement, the PPN Workers will develop a report for the Plenary on the work of the PPN since the date of the last Plenary meeting.

### *Consultation Supports*

As well as supporting the PPN Representatives elected by the PPN to represent them on Local Authority Boards and Committees, the PPN also facilitates its Member Groups to have their say in a range of consultations of importance to them. Notifications of these consultations will usually come from the PPN Workers who will then decide how they should be facilitated. This work can be very time consuming and will largely depend on the support of the Secretariat and Plenary.

Depending on the consultation, this may be:

- Circulation of an online form
- Requesting written submissions by post / email / an online form developed by the PPN Workers specifically for the consultation
- Holding consultation events with Member Groups

The Workers will be the most likely to notice where “gaps” in engagement arise, i.e. marginalised groups who may have difficulty accessing IT to make online submissions or who may have literacy / numeracy difficulties or who, because of previous experiences, may be reluctant to engage with official processes. The PPN Workers are therefore key to making sure that all PPN Member Groups can participate effectively.

Each PPN must have a Constitution in place to govern its activities. This Constitution must be developed by the PPN in consultation with its Member Groups and

approved by the Plenary. The PPN Workers should support the Secretariat to review the Constitution regularly to make sure that it is consistent with the terms of this Handbook, all Departmental Circulars and the PPN objectives.

### *Supporting the Development of a Vision for Community Wellbeing*

The Vision for Community Wellbeing is intended to set out a vision for the wellbeing of the community for this and future generations. Ensuring that PPNs set aside time to explore what the Member Groups want to achieve for their community, in order that these aspirations can inform the PPNs' work. A number of PPNs have 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) is worthwhile, yet time-consuming. It 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. In supporting the development of this Vision, the PPN Workers are expected to attend training on both the process used to develop the Vision and, where necessary, the facilitation skills required to facilitate consultations with Member Groups.

PPN Workers should also make themselves available to review the consultation inputs and develop the draft wording for consultation.

### *Municipal District PPNs*

The large majority of counties are now organised into Municipal Districts, where the councillors and Local Authority staff have certain powers relating to operational and maintenance works within the District. It is recommended that Municipal District PPNs be established in each Municipal District in a PPN area. This is where local decision-making happens and each PPN should have a presence in each Municipal District to make sure that the voice of the community is heard. The PPN Secretariat and PPN Workers should work with the Member Groups to encourage their participation at Municipal District level, or any other types of sub-structures in cities, by communicating the benefits of doing this in a clear and accessible way.

In cities where there is no Municipal District structure, PPNs may want to establish sub PPNs in defined geographical areas, perhaps based on Electoral Divisions or Local Area Committees of the Local Authority.

### Provision of Support to PPN Representatives

#### *Elections and Appointments*

The Resource Workers and Support Workers play an important role in the nomination and election processes for the Representative roles. As the main point of contact, they organise the nomination processes, make sure the information is sent to the Member Groups in enough time to make their nomination (where such information is provided to the PPN Worker), organise the ballot if an election is required, and communicate at all stages in the process to the Secretariat and the Member Groups.

#### *Induction Training and Supports*

The PPN Workers also arrange the induction training schedule for the newly appointed Representatives, in addition to induction training arranged by the Local Authority Board or Committee.

They also support PPN Representatives throughout their term of office. This means making sure that the PPN Representatives have access to the relevant information before their meetings, have access to the Representatives Reporting Template (see sample at Appendix 4) and are reminded to complete the template if this is not completed within a reasonable timeframe.

### Provision of Support to the PPN Secretariat

Acknowledging that the Secretariat is made up of volunteers who are part of Member Groups and have a voluntary role on the Secretariat, with all of the obligations and responsibilities that goes along with that, the PPN Workers also provide key supports to the Secretariat. This role may vary between PPNs but, in general, the PPN Workers will provide supports with

- Elections and Appointments
- Induction Training and Supports
- Provision of Relevant Information
- Developing the Annual PPN Budget
- Developing the Workplan
- Producing the Annual Report
- Developing the Strategic Plan

#### *Elections and Appointments*

The PPN Workers play a key role in the nominations and elections processes for the Secretariat. As the main point of contact, they organise the nominations processes, make sure information is sent to the Member Groups in good time to facilitate nominations, and oversee the process of appointments. They also arrange the Plenary meetings at which the Secretariat is elected and approved.

### *Induction Training and Supports*

The PPN Workers arrange the induction training schedule for the newly appointed Secretariat members and make sure that they are supported in their work. This includes making sure that all new Secretariat members can access the policies and procedures of the PPN, providing some supports in organising Secretariat meetings and supporting the Secretariat in the development of the PPN Workplan.

### *Provision of Relevant Information*

The PPN Workers will likely be the first point of contact for a range of stakeholders and their networking will provide them with useful information on areas of importance to the PPN. Much of this information will be of relevance to the Secretariat and the PPN Workers should make sure that the Secretariat are kept informed and up to date to allow them to carry out their duties. The Resource Worker may also be asked to provide financial and operational reports to the Secretariat at their meetings.

### *Developing the Annual PPN Budget*

The PPN Workers should work with the Secretariat to develop the annual PPN Budget for approval by the Plenary and in accordance with the PPN Constitution, its objectives, its Workplan, its Strategic Plan and Departmental Circulars.

### *Developing the Workplan*

The Secretariat is responsible for the development of the PPN Workplan and develops it in consultation with the Local Authority, in collaboration with the PPN Workers and consultation with Member Groups. This Workplan is then put forward to the Plenary for approval.

The PPN Workers must support the Secretariat to develop this Workplan and to make sure that it is capable of being presented to the Plenary in good time to be approved or amended before its implementation.

### *Producing the Annual Report*

The job descriptions for both the Resource Workers and the Support Workers provide for general duties as required by the PPN to make sure it operates effectively. These duties include, but are not limited to, supporting the Secretariat to complete the Annual Report return on a timely basis. It is essential that these returns are completed and returned by the given deadline as not doing this can impact funding allocations.

### *Developing the Strategic Plan*

Each PPN should have a Strategic Plan in place that covers a period, subject to annual funding allocations, of three to five years. This Strategic Plan should be developed by the Member Groups of the PPN; written up by the Secretariat and Workers; and approved by the Plenary.

### Liaising with the Local Authority

One of the PPN's key relationships is with the Local Authority. The PPN is the route for all community representation on Local Authority Boards and Committees, it is also a key channel for Local Authority consultations. PPNs can support the work of the Local Authority by facilitating consultations with their Member Groups and encouraging support for relevant Local Authority projects where these are of benefit to their members.

Grants available from the Local Authority are of interest to PPN Member Groups. The Local Authority will provide the PPN with information about these grants, and the PPN Workers will distribute this information to the PPN Member Groups. The PPN Workers should not be asked to administer these grants on behalf of the Local Authority as this would impact on the independence of the PPN.

Some PPN Workers will be recruited and employed by the Local Authority, however when they are assigned to the PPN, they are facilitated and enabled in their day to day duties by the Secretariat to further the PPN objectives. The terms of this arrangement should be set out in the Memorandum of Understanding between the PPN and the Local Authority and should be clearly stated in any assignment arrangement that is in place. Insofar as possible, and subject to budgetary provision, the assignment arrangements should cover a specific period (three years is suggested) in order to provide continuity to the PPN in terms of PPN workers while recognising that some events are outside the control of the assigning organisation.

### The PPN Budget

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.

### Liaising with the Department of Rural and Community Development

In addition to funding, the Department of Rural and Community Development also provides support to PPNs on operational matters through Departmental circulars. The PPN Workers must support the Secretariat to make sure that these circulars are available to all who need to be aware of them and that the PPN complies with them. If the Secretariat or the PPN Workers are unsure as to what is meant by the Department in any of its circulars, they should seek clarification as soon as possible from the Department.

### Working at national level

PPN Workers, while primarily engaged to work within their own Local Authority geographical areas, will also have the opportunity to work at a regional or national level with colleagues, for example as part of the PPN National Advisory Group, at the National Ploughing Championships, organising and attending the National PPN Conference, and participating in national-level projects and committees from time to time. Transitioning from local to regional or national-level engagement allows the PPNs to use their collective experience and expertise to input into policies and strategies that directly affect them, their communities and their Member Groups.

Resource Workers are encouraged to participate in the National Resource Workers Network, where they will gain peer-to-peer support, shared learning and advice on best practice developments.

### Election to Government Office

In order to preserve the independence of the PPN, current PPN workers cannot stand for election to any Government office, local, national or European, while remaining in their post. If a PPN worker decides to stand for election to Government office, they must resign their position immediately before putting their name forward for nomination.

If a PPN worker is unsuccessful in their bid to be nominated for election to Government office, they must wait at least 12 months after the date on which they were advised that their bid for nomination was unsuccessful before applying for a PPN worker role again.

If the PPN worker is nominated for election, but is unsuccessful in their election, they must wait at least 12 months after the date of the election before applying for a PPN worker role again.

If the PPN worker is successfully elected, they must wait at least 12 months from the date their term of office expires before applying for a PPN worker role again.



## The National Resource Worker Network

The National Resource Worker Network is made up of representatives from each of the 31 PPNs. This group meets to discuss best practice across the PPN network and to work collaboratively to strengthen the PPN as a whole, with an awareness and acceptance of the local and regional differences.

PPN Workers are also encouraged to engage and collaborate at regional level to informal structures.

## Travel and Expenses



PPN Workers will be paid reasonable travel and expenses for meetings and other work-related activities that take place outside their home/usual place of work. Such expenses will be paid in accordance with public sector norms and the PPN Travel and Expenses Policy (see sample at Appendix 6) and only where these expenses are not recoupable from another sources (e.g. from attending a local authority meeting, in which case expenses should be met by the LA).