

**Approved by
Plenary
23/04/2026**



**CORK COUNTY
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORK (PPN)**

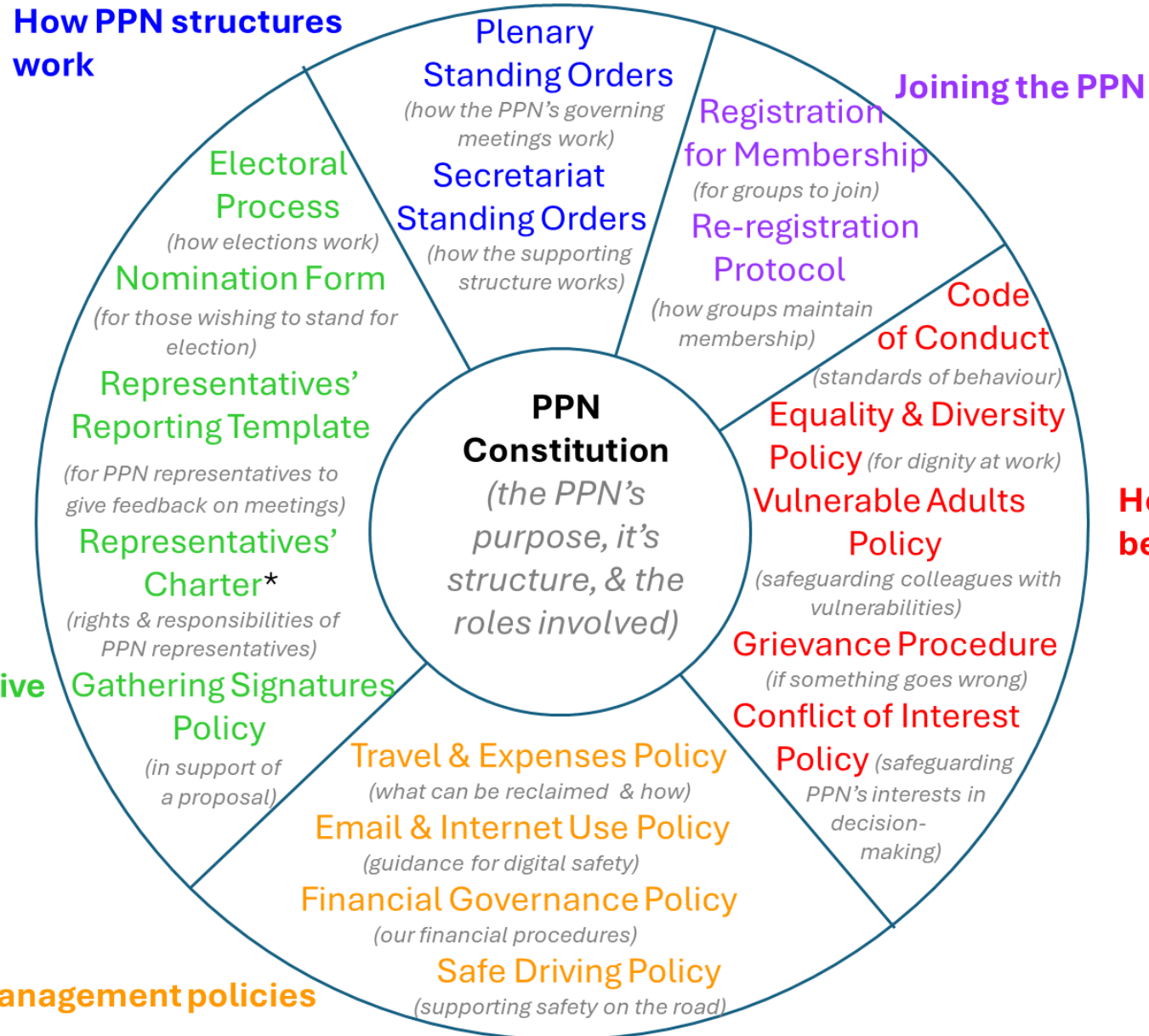
**What the Cork County PPN is
and how it operates**

CONSTITUTION
(in Full)

Date last reviewed: 23rd April 2026

PPN Governance Documents

Being a PPN Representative



What the Cork County PPN is and how it operates: our Constitution

1.0 SUMMARY

This summary section sets out what the PPN is and how it works. Further details are contained in the following sections of the Constitution and accompanying documents and can be located by clicking on the links included here.

1.1 WHAT IS THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORK

The Public Participation Network (the PPN) was set up as the main link through which Cork County Council (the Council) and local community groups engage with one another, and does this in a way that is fair, clear and respectful. It is a formal network open to all community and voluntary organisations in the County.

1.2 WHAT THE PPN DOES

1.2.i Our Mission

The mission of the PPN is to enable the voluntary community groups of Cork County to:

- take an active role in the policy making and overseeing of the Council's areas of responsibilities
- influence and improve decision-making in the Cork County Council area, and
- to be the main link through which the Council engages with the community groups

1.2.ii Our Vision

Our vision is to have the PPN as an integral and respected local decision-making partner and network. We want to see the PPN engaged and pro-actively consulted in the development of all Cork County economic, social, community, environmental and infrastructural policies. We want to ensure that all PPN Member Groups are aware of their ability to make a difference for their community and are well supported to do this.

Greater detail about our Vision is contained in the [PPN Vision for Community Wellbeing](#).

1.2.iii Aims

We have a number of general aims that inform our work. *(More details can be found [HERE](#).)* We work actively to the specific aims set out in our [Annual Workplan](#), which are in line with our general aims.

1.3 WHAT GUIDES HOW THE PPN OPERATES

The operation of the PPN and its relationships internally and with outside organisations are guided by our commitment to a set of 6 core values and principles. More details are given in [other policies](#).

1.3 i Our Values

Our values mean that we are:

- **Inclusive** of all volunteer-led groups in the County, and we actively look to include groups that might not otherwise be included or who might not often have their voice heard
- **Participatory**, open, welcoming, respectful, willing to work together and support each other. We encourage participation by Member Groups in all PPN work and support the involvement of new Member Groups
- **Independent** from the Council and of any vested interests in our work (although the PPN must account to the Council for its budget)
- **Valuing of Diversity** and recognise that the PPN is made up of people and Member Groups with a wide range of different views, experiences and opinions. The PPN works to represent all their range of views
- **Transparent** in everything that we do. We communicate clearly, concisely, simply and in a timely manner with all Member Groups, using modern technology as appropriate and ensuring that information is accessible
- **Accountable** to our Member Groups, and this is supported through the [policies and procedures](#) we have in place which set out how we operate.

1.3.ii Essential characteristics

In addition, the PPN is committed to being:

- **democratic** in its processes, and to using consensus or qualified consensus in decision-making wherever possible
- **a flat structure** where everyone has the opportunity to participate in the different roles involved (see sections 1.5 and 5 below)
- **supportive** of Member Groups developing their skills and capacity to get involved in representation.

1.3.iii Detailed guidance documents

We have a number of guidance documents setting out policies and procedures in addition to the Constitution and further details of these can be found [HERE](#). (This list may be amended over time.)

1.4 WHO IS INVOLVED IN THE PPN

1.4.i Full membership of the PPN is open to all community groups and organisations that:

- ✓ have an address in Cork County and are volunteer led
- ✓ are not for profit, non-political and non-sectarian organisations
- ✓ are independent
- ✓ have at least three (3) members and are open to new members
- ✓ are in existence for at least six (6) months
- ✓ have an appropriate formal structure with an agreed set of rules and financial procedures
- ✓ meet regularly, and at least quarterly
- ✓ are national organisations with headquarters in Cork County or they are a local County Branch
- ✓ complete the PPN [Membership Registration Form](#) satisfactorily





1.4.ii Associate membership is open to groups and organisations not eligible for full membership but who:

- engage with or support the PPN
- are a valid community group, organisation or service
- work in related, supportive or similar fields to that of the PPN or its members
- agree to comply with PPN policies and Constitution
- have a Branch, Group, Association, etc. established in Cork County for at least one year

1.4.iii Member Groups elect to belong to 1 of the 3 “**Electoral Colleges**” of the PPN:

- ❖ Social and Inclusion
- ❖ Community and Voluntary
- ❖ Environmental (subject to approval by the Irish Environmental Network)

1.5 HOW THE PPN IS ORGANISED The PPN structure is illustrated below.

1.5.i PLENARY		The PPN PLENARY is the <u>network</u> of ALL MEMBER GROUPS. It meets twice each year to agree what work the PPN is to undertake & sets this out in our Annual Work Plan.
1.5.ii SECRETARIAT		The Plenary elects the SECRETARIAT to oversee the work that the Plenary has agreed.
1.5.iii LINKAGE GROUPS		We set up LINKAGE GROUPS to discuss particular policy areas Member Groups are interested in.
1.5.iv STAFF		Our staff of CO-ORDINATOR & SUPPORT WORKER support the Plenary and Secretariat in their work.

1.6 REPRESENTING the PPN

PPN Representatives are nominated by Member Groups and elected by the Plenary (all Member Groups) to carry out specific roles including;

- representing the view of Member Groups at external committees
- working on the Secretariat on behalf of all Member Groups
- being a facilitator for a Linkage Group
- carrying out any other PPN representative role

(Details of the representatives' role, responsibilities and rights, elections and conduct can be found in the Representatives' Charter [HERE](#).)

1.7 LINKAGE GROUPS

These Groups are made up of Member Groups with a shared interest, who meet together to discuss their diverse views and interests in a specific policy area, and to advocate to the Council for policy changes on behalf of the community.

(Further details of how Linkage Groups operate can be found [HERE](#).)

1.8 HOW THE PPN IS FUNDED

The PPN is funded annually through the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (DRCDG) and Cork County Council. Funding is to cover the cost of the two PPN staff and their office, and expenses that arise for PPN activities or Representatives attending meetings. The Financial Statement approved by the Secretariat is sent to all Member Groups ahead of the Plenary AGM and a financial report is made to the DRCDG. The PPN is currently hosted by Cork County Council as set out in the agreed Memorandum of Understanding. *(More details on financial management can be found [HERE](#).)*

1.9 MAKING CHANGES TO OUR CONSTITUTION

Changes can be made to the PPN Constitution and our policies and procedures by either the Secretariat or 30 or more active Member Groups. The proposed change must be sent to all Member Groups and put on the agenda of the next Annual General Meeting or an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Plenary arranged for that purpose. A change comes into effect immediately if it is passed by a simple majority of those present at the Plenary.

2.0 ADOPTION OF CONSTITUTION

This revised version of our Constitution was adopted at the PPN Plenary held on

Signed on behalf of Cork County Public Participation Network by

Present chairperson

Date: 23/04/2026

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[LINK](#) to current Cork County PPN [Vision for Community Wellbeing](#)

[LINK](#) to current Annual Work Plan

2.0 WHAT THE PPN DOES

2.1 Background

PPNs were created in June 2014, as part of the Local Government Reform Act which restructured the relationship between local communities and Local Authorities. There is a PPN established in each of the Local Authority areas in the Country.

The PPN is the mechanism through which community representation is provided on committees of the Cork County Council, such as:

- Strategic Policy Committees
- Local Community Development Committees (3 in Cork County)
- Local Community Safety Partnership
- other committees of the County Council (as required)
- other authorities and committees outside of the Cork County Council remit

with the number of representatives to be elected onto each agreed with Cork County Council or the organisation concerned.

Community groups or organisations who wish to participate must register with the PPN.

2.2 Our Name

The name of the organisation is “Cork County Public Participation Network” otherwise referred to as “Cork County PPN” or “the PPN”.

2.3 Our Mission

The Mission of the PPN is to enable the community groups of Cork County to:

- take an active role in the policy making and overseeing of the Council’s areas of responsibilities
- influence and improve decision-making in the Cork County Council area, and
- to be the main link through which the Council engages with the community groups

2.4 Our Vision

Our vision is to have the PPN be an integral and respected local decision-making partner and network. We want to see the PPN engaged and pro-actively consulted in the development of all Cork County economic, social, community, environmental and infrastructural policies. We want to ensure that all PPN Member Groups are aware of their ability to make a difference for their community and are well supported to do this.

Our Vision is expanded in the [PPN Vision for Community Wellbeing](#).

2.5 Our Aims

The general aims of the PPN are to:

- represent the Environmental, Social Inclusion, and Community and Voluntary Sector’s interests of Cork County on policy making and advisory bodies of and for Cork County Council (this is our core function)
- participate in and contribute to the development of the vision of Cork County Council for the well-being of this and future generations
- support social, cultural, technological and economic development of the Cork County Area and the protection of our environment
- proactively promote the benefits and advantages of community representation on boards and committees.

- ensure that all community-based organisations and groups in the Cork County area are aware of the work and existence of the PPN
- ensure that all community-based organisations and groups in Cork County are aware of the nomination process to become a PPN representative
- ensure that all community sector representation on all Cork County Council sponsored bodies is selected via the PPN
- facilitate opportunities for networking, communication and the sharing of information between the various Colleges of community groups (Environmental, Social Inclusion, and Community and Voluntary) and between these groups and the Elected Members and staff of Cork County Council
- ensure that all relevant Information of Cork County Council is circulated to the PPN
- identify issues both of individual and collective concern and advocate to influence policy locally and nationally in relation to these issues
- monitor and evaluate existing policies of Cork County Council for impact, outcome and output on the community
- actively support the inclusion of socially excluded groups or communities experiencing high levels of poverty, discrimination or disadvantage and to facilitate their participation at local and Cork County Council area level and to clearly demonstrate this support
- ensure that the sectors both individually and collectively always act professionally and have a strong collective voice within the Cork County area and on relevant national structures
- support the individual members of the PPN so that they can develop their own capacity and perform their work more effectively, participate effectively in PPN activities, and ensure their voices and concerns are listened to and included in relevant policy proposals
- uphold this constitution

Specifically, we work to the aims set out in our [Annual Workplan](#), which are in line with these general aims.

3.0 WHAT GUIDES HOW THE PPN OPERATES

The operation of the PPN and its relationships internally and with outside organisations are guided by our commitment to a set of 6 core values and 4 principles. We also have a number of other agreed policies.

3.1 Our core values

Our values mean that we are:

- **Inclusive** of all volunteer-led groups in the County, and we actively look to include groups that might not otherwise be included or who might not often have their voice heard
- **Participatory**, open, welcoming, respectful, willing to work together and supportive of each other. The PPN encourages participation by Member Groups in all of its work and supports the involvement of new Member Groups
- **Independent** from the Council and of any vested interests in our work (although the PPN must account to the Council for its budget)
- **Valuing of Diversity** and recognise that the PPN is made up of people and Member Groups with a wide range of different views, experiences and opinions. The PPN works to represent all this range of views
- **Transparent** in everything that we do. We communicate clearly, concisely, simply and in a timely manner with all Member Groups, using modern technology as appropriate and ensuring that information is accessible
- **Accountable** to our Member Groups, and this is supported through the policies and procedures we have in place which set out how we operate

3.2 Our essential characteristics

In addition, the PPN is committed to being:

- **democratic**: in all its process, and using consensus or qualified consensus in decision-making
- **a flat structure** where everyone has the opportunity to participate in the different roles involved
- **supportive** of Member Groups developing their skills and capacity to get involved in representation

3.3 Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (the Department)

The Department provides support to PPNs on operational matters through Department circulars which the Secretariat ensures are circulated to anyone who may need to be aware of them and are complied with. Clarification, if needed, is to be sought from the Department, and the Secretariat ensures that any necessary changes to governance documentation are made and ratified at the next Plenary.

3.4 Detailed guidance documents

We have a several policy documents that set out how we behave and treat one another and all those that we come into contact with. These include our:

- Code of Conduct (P5)
- Dignity at Work Policy (addressing equality and diversity) (P6)
- Vulnerable Adults Policy (P7)
- Grievance Procedure (P8)

This list and the documents themselves may be amended over time by decision of the Plenary.

4.0 WHO IS INVOLVED IN THE PPN

The PPN includes both Full and Associate members.

4.1 Full membership

Full membership of the PPN is open to all community groups and organisations that:

- ✓ have an address in Cork County and are volunteer led
- ✓ are not for profit, non-political and non-sectarian organisation
- ✓ are independent
- ✓ have at least five (5) members and are open to new members
- ✓ are in existence for at least six (6) months
- ✓ have an appropriate formal structure with an agreed set of rules and financial procedures
- ✓ meet regularly, and at least quarterly
- ✓ are national organisations with headquarters in Cork County or they are a local County Branch
- ✓ complete the PPN Registration Form

4.2 Associate membership

Associate Membership provides a link between key community groups and organisations and services in Cork County who are excluded from Full Membership; making it possible for them to engage with PPN Member Groups and have a voice on matters of interest. Associate membership is open to organisations not eligible for full membership but who:

- engage with or support the PPN
- are a valid community group, organisation or service
- work is related, supportive or similar fields to that of the PPN or its members
- agree to comply with PPN policies and constitution
- have a Branch, Group, Association, etc. established in Cork County for at least one year

Organisations that may qualify for Associate Membership include but are not limited to:

- Local Development Companies
- university departments or research centres, colleges, other third level groups or associations
- charitable trusts and foundations
- other civil society, voluntary and community organisations
- other NGOs

4.2.i Rights of Associate Membership

Associate members can:

- Attend PPN training and events.
- Attend Linkage Groups and Plenary and contribute to discussion; however **Associate Members do not have voting rights.**
- Receive information – newsletters, meeting minutes, etc.

4.3 Registration Process

- 4.3.i Community groups looking to join the PPN must register by filling out the Registration form (P3).
- 4.3.ii The Cork County PPN [Registration Form](#) can be filled out on the PPN website <here> or a hard copy (P3) may be requested from the PPN or Cork County Council.
- 4.3.iii The Cork County PPN Registration form is used to register groups for the purpose of membership of the PPN.
- 4.3.iv Registration Forms are processed by the PPN Secretariat through its staff who assess eligibility for membership and ensure the appropriate Electoral College has been chosen (i.e. Community, Environment and Social Inclusion).

4.3.v The process of registering for associate membership is the same as that outlined in section 4.3.i to 4.3.iv above.

The PPN may seek copies of relevant documentation to validate membership.

4.4 Term of Membership

Once an organisation has become a member of the PPN they shall be required to reaffirm their membership details every two years prior to the Annual General Plenary Meeting in that year (see [P4 Re-registration Protocol](#) for further details).

4.5 All Member Groups belong to 1 of the 3 “Electoral Colleges” of the PPN

The PPN membership is divided into three Colleges. Each Member Group must decide to participate in the College which represents their primary interest. The Colleges are:

- ❖ Social and Inclusion
- ❖ Community and Voluntary
- ❖ Environmental (subject to approval by the Environmental Pillar)

4.5.i Social Inclusion College

The main focus of our Social Inclusion College Member Groups is to improve the life chances and opportunities of those who are:

- marginalised in society
- living in poverty, or
- living with unemployment

Social inclusion members work to develop and build sustainable communities. They aim to build communities that promote the values of equality and inclusion and that have respect for human rights.

Members of this College focus on working with the most marginalised including, but not limited to, disadvantaged young people, ethnic minorities, homeless people, older adults, Travellers, people with disabilities, substance misusers, or women.

4.5.ii Environmental College

The main aim of Environmental College Member Groups is to protect or sustain the environment. The national Environmental Pillar decides what type of groups can be members of the Environmental College in all PPNs.

Environmental College Member Groups work on building sustainable communities and achieving a sustainable future. Their work may include, but is not limited to, developing organic horticulture, environmental education, preventing the spread of invasive species, protecting wildlife, recycling, resource efficiency, and sustainable planning.

(Note: Membership of the Environmental College must be confirmed by the Irish Environmental Network as meeting the above criteria.)

4.5.iii Community and Voluntary College

The main aim or activity of Community and Voluntary College Member Groups is to improve the quality of life and wellbeing of their community. This College is the largest and most diverse of the three PPN Colleges.

The wide range of groups in this College may include, but are not limited to, active citizenship, arts, sports, community safety, drama, emergency services, festivals, heritage, leisure, residents’ associations, or youth.

5.0 HOW THE PPN IS ORGANISED; OUR STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT

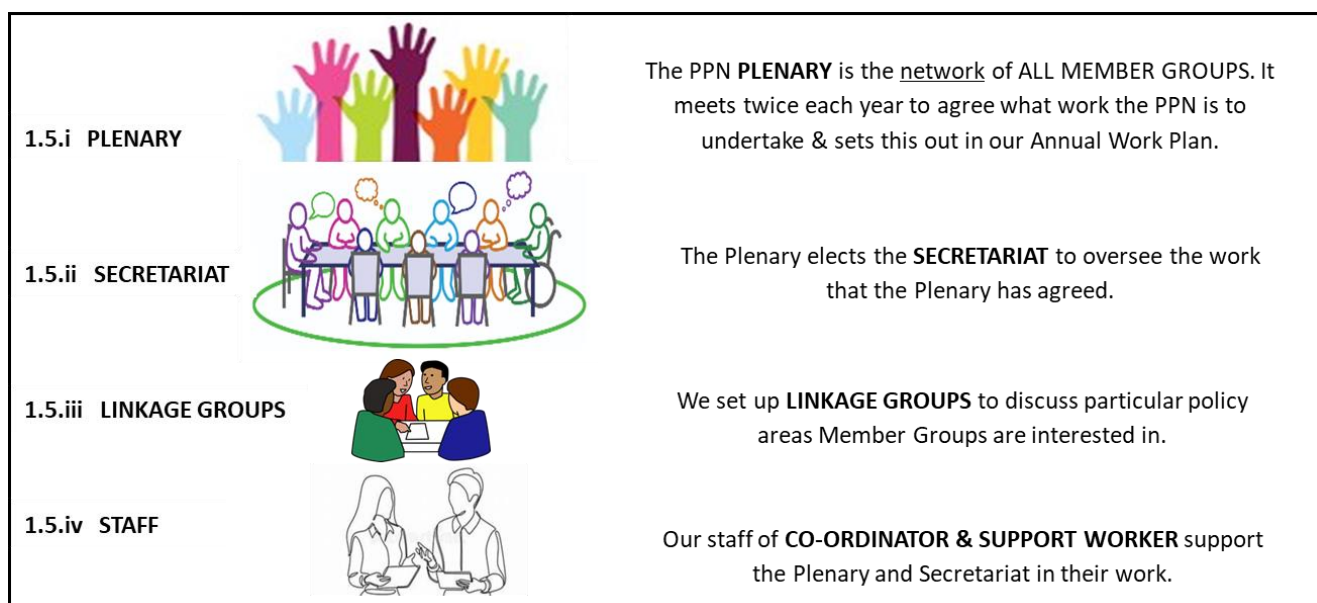
5.1 Overview of Structure

The PPN structure is “flat” which means all members of the PPN have an equal voice and an equal input into decision making in accordance with Government policy. The structure is composed of:

- the Plenary
- the Secretariat
- Linkage Groups
- Support staff

Flat structures are unusual in Ireland and so it is vital that strong and clear governance procedures are in place that respect this flat structure and ensure that the PPN can conduct its business in an efficient, effective, and accountable manner.

The PPN structure is illustrated here and the different elements are explained below.



5.2 The Plenary

The full PPN membership (all Full Member Groups, excluding Associate Members) is referred to as the Plenary. The Plenary is the governing body of the PPN with overall responsibility for the Network and decision-making. It meets at least twice a year. The first session of the year is the Annual General Meeting of the PPN membership.

5.2.i Responsibilities of the Plenary

At its Annual General Meeting, the Plenary has a number of key responsibilities, including;

- a) ratification of the election of Secretariat members, where vacancies have arisen. The Secretariat is designed to be representative of the three (3) PPN Colleges ([see 4.5 above](#))
- b) ratification of representatives elected to Council and other committees where vacancies have arisen
- c) consideration and ratification of the [Annual Workplan](#) developed by the Secretariat and PPN staff
- d) review and sign off on annual budget and expenditure

Note: Successful election candidates are deemed ratified by the Plenary until its next meeting, when the result of the election is confirmed or not. Those elected are expected to fulfil their roles in the meantime.

5.2.ii Participation, quorum, voting rights and decision-making at Plenary

- a) At least one member from each Full Member Group shall be entitled to attend. However many members attend from a Full Member Group they shall have only one vote between them on behalf of their organisation.
- b) At least one member from each Associate Member Group shall be entitled to attend Plenary meetings. These participants have speaking rights but may not vote.
- c) Wherever possible, decisions at Plenary will be reached by consensus. However, final decisions may be by simple majority vote if this is necessary.
- d) To be legitimate, a Plenary meeting must be quorate. The quorum for a Plenary meeting is fifteen separate persons representing fifteen Full Member Groups.

5.2.iii Arrangements for Plenary meetings and agendas

Plenary meetings will be arranged according to the following procedure:

- a) The dates for convening Plenary meetings shall be decided by the Plenary in session at the Annual General Meeting of the Plenary or, in the absence of such decision, by the Secretariat.
- b) Notice of Plenary meetings shall be circulated to all Member Groups not less than one month prior to the date of such Session.
- c) The agenda shall be drawn up by the Secretariat. Items and motions for discussion shall be forwarded by Member Groups at least 10 days prior to the meeting.
- d) All Plenary meetings shall be conducted according to [Plenary Standing Orders](#) (P1, p.26) in consultation with members.

5.2.iv Extraordinary General Meetings

An Extraordinary General Meeting of full Member Groups shall be held at any time on the decision of the Secretariat or on receipt by the Secretariat of a concise request of not more than one (1) A4 page signed by 30 full Member Groups (excluding Associated Members) to convene such a meeting. Instructions on supports available to gather signatures are available in the [Gathering Signatures document](#) (P14, p.74).

The Secretariat shall decide within five working days of receipt of such request the date, time, and place such a meeting shall be held which shall be not more than twenty-one working days following receipt of the request by Secretariat.

The Notice to Member Groups shall state:

- the date, time and place of the meeting
- the business to be transacted
- the text of original request or proposal.

The Rotating Chair of the Secretariat shall act as the Chair of the Extraordinary General Meeting or, where the Rotating Chair fails or is unable to act, the Secretariat shall appoint one of its Members to act as Chair. Where the Secretariat fails to appoint a Chair, the Extraordinary General meeting shall appoint a Chair by simple majority vote. Only votes of full Member Groups attending are permitted.

Where the Secretariat fails or omits to comply with a request to hold an Extraordinary General Meeting or the Secretariat has resigned in block, then the full Member Group who initiated the request in the first instance shall convene such an Extraordinary General Meeting at a date, time, and place stipulated by them. This Member Group will notify all Member Groups of the Meeting details, with the support of the PPN staff, stating the business to be transacted and the text of original request or proposal. At an Extraordinary General Meeting called in this manner:

- the meeting may only address the business raised in the original request
- the election of a Chair for the meeting will be taken as the beginning of the meeting

ALL Extraordinary General Meetings shall be conducted under [Plenary Standing Orders](#) (P1, p.26) ,in consultation with members.

5.2.v Municipal District Plenaries

As the PPN develops, Plenary meetings will be arranged at a Municipal District level. The notice period for a Municipal District Plenary shall be the same, however the quorum shall be 6 full members (i.e. a minimum of 6 persons representing 6 separate Full Member Organisations).

A Municipal District PPN is a meeting of all the Member Groups with a postal address in that Municipal District. Each Municipal District PPN should develop a [Vision for Community Wellbeing](#) for their area as well as addressing locally based policy issues and engaging with Local Authority staff and elected members. Municipal District PPNs are not intended to create additional work for Member Groups; for many this local level of participation may be more relevant to their needs rather than the larger County PPN.

5.3 The Secretariat

The Secretariat is elected by Member Groups to oversee the work that the Plenary has agreed the PPN should carry out.

5.3.i Make-up of the Secretariat

The make-up of the Secretariat is intended to ensure representation of the 3 PPN Colleges and of the different areas of the County. The Secretariat has 22 members drawn from full Member Groups as follows:

- **6 countywide representatives, 2 from each of the 3 Electoral Colleges** comprised of:
 - Community & Voluntary College - 2 representatives
 - Social Inclusion College – 2 representatives
 - Environmental College – 2 representatives
- **16 representatives from Municipal Districts, 2 from each of the 8 Municipal District**
 - Bandon/Kinsale – 2 representatives
 - Carrigaline – 2 representatives
 - Cobh – 2 representatives
 - East Cork – 2 representatives
 - Fermoy – 2 representatives
 - Kanturk/Mallow – 2 representatives
 - Macroom – 2 representatives
 - West Cork – 2 representatives

5.3.ii Term of membership on the Secretariat

One fifth of Secretariat seats will be put up for election each year. In the event of there being sufficient vacancies no existing Secretariat members will be required to stand down. If there is full Secretariat membership in place, or membership is such that some members must relinquish their seats to create vacancies of one fifth of the Secretariat places for election, then the longest serving Secretariat members must stand down. Members having stepped down may offer themselves for re-election.

An individual may not serve on the Secretariat for more than ten consecutive years. In total, a member shall not serve more than a total of fifteen years on the Secretariat.

5.3.iv Election to the Secretariat

a) For Electoral College places on the Secretariat

Candidates must belong to, and be nominated by, a Full Member Group of the PPN from the relevant Electoral College. The electorate for these representative positions is comprised of ALL the Full Member Groups belonging to that PPN College, who will vote to decide their representatives.

b) For municipal district places on the Secretariat

Candidates must belong to, and be nominated by, a Full Member Group of the PPN based in the relevant municipal district. The electorate for these representative positions is comprised of ALL the Full Member Groups based in that municipal district, who will vote to decide their representatives.

- c) Where the number of legitimate nominations matches the number of vacancies those people nominated are deemed to be elected
- d) At every election, a panel of candidates will be kept with the order of their results. Any vacancy arising on the Secretariat between the annual election process shall be filled by the next highest scoring candidate on the panel who is willing to serve on the Secretariat.
- e) Any Secretariat member standing for election to public office must resign their position immediately before putting their name forward for nomination. Such a member may not stand for re-election to the Secretariat for 12 months following either their failure to secure a nomination or election, or when they cease to hold public office.
- f) Council staff cannot be a member of the Secretariat, even if they are part of a Member Group.
- g) New Secretariat members will receive induction training including
 - the role of the PPN, its values and principles
 - the role of the Secretariat
 - the Code of Conduct and Standing Orders
 - an overview of how the PPN operates, its policies and procedures

5.3.v Meetings of the Secretariat

The quorum for Secretariat meetings shall be one third of present membership plus one.

The Secretariat shall agree an annual schedule of meetings, with a minimum of nine meetings each year, on a monthly basis. No meetings will be held in June, July and December unless to deal with extraordinary business.

The Secretariat shall hold ordinary meetings at locations around the County or electronically, to be decided by the Secretariat.

5.3.vi Attendance at Secretariat meetings

All Secretariat members shall attend the two Plenary meetings in each year.

Any person elected to the Secretariat who fails to attend three consecutive meetings of the Secretariat, without good reason in the opinion of the rest of the Secretariat, they shall automatically be considered to have removed themselves from their position on the Secretariat. Such a decision may be appealed through the [Grievance Procedure \(P8, p.??\)](#) If no appeal is made, or an appeal is unsuccessful, the vacancy arising shall be filled as soon as possible by the next available member on the panel as set out above.

In the event that there is no panel from which to invite a new member to join the Secretariat when a vacancy occurs between annual election processes, the Secretariat may agree to co-opt an individual from a full Member Group that meets the criteria for the position.

The Secretariat shall have authority to fill any temporary vacancy being 3 months or more arising from a member being absent on Leave of Absence, Study Leave, Maternity Leave, etc. for the duration of that leave period.

5.3.vii Emergency and other meetings of the Secretariat

Emergency meetings of the Secretariat may be held where a minimum of seven (7) members of the Secretariat sign a request that the Secretariat be convened, setting out clearly the reasons for such a meeting. Such a request shall be sent to the Rotating Chair who is responsible for the operation of Secretariat. On receipt of such request the Rotating Chair shall immediately arrange for the holding of the meeting within seven (7) days of the date of such receipt.

Other meetings of the Secretariat may be held where the Rotating Chair is of the opinion that a situation has arisen for the holding of such a meeting.

5.3.viii Responsibilities of the Secretariat

The Secretariat is the key day-to-day administrative body within the PPN Structure. It:

- a) ensures the proper functioning of the PPN between Plenary meetings and in accordance with this Constitution on behalf of Member Groups, putting the operational decisions of the Plenary in place
- b) is accountable to the Plenary
- c) manages the PPN budget including on-going financial matters and decisions
- d) keeps correct, up-to-date, records of PPN business including minutes of meetings, ensures all materials such as agendas are circulated in good time
- e) help to organise PPN activities on behalf of Member Groups
- f) ensures that PPN processes work, as far as practicable, in accordance with this Constitution and in an efficient and effective manner, maintaining a flat structure
- g) communicates regularly with all PPN Member Groups and shares information about all PPN activities as widely as possible
- h) overseeing elections for PPN Representatives
- i) arranging for the development and reviewing of the PPN's [Vision for Community Wellbeing](#)
- j) establishes sub-groups to address in detail certain defined matters that arise from time to time
- k) managing the membership database of the PPN (subject to GDPR regulations)
- l) ensures appropriate administrative support is available for the efficient functioning of the PPN, including considering recruiting support through work placement schemes funded by public monies
- m) determines the time and place of Plenary meetings unless otherwise directed by Plenary
- n) is a point of contact for the PPN for the Council, DRCDG, other PPNs, the National Advisory Group and other PPN stakeholders
- o) cooperates with the National Advisory Group established for Monitoring and Evaluation of PPN's and the Department (DRCDG), ensuring compliance with circulars and direction received
- p) agrees an Annual Work Plan for ratification at Plenary including:
 - a. Participation in Decision Making and Representation
 - b. Capacity building
 - c. Information Sharing and Communication
 - d. Other activities as agreed
- q) reviews the PPN's hosting arrangements and annual agreement of the Memorandum of Understanding with the County Council, and engages with the Council Community Development Office regarding their oversight responsibility
- r) appoints a Rotating Chair of Secretariat Meetings with a maximum term of 1 year (i.e. Plenary AGM to AGM). The position of Rotating Chair should rotate to ensure Secretariat members acquire relevant experience of this function. The Rotating Chair's successor should be selected prior to the Plenary meeting at which the Rotating Chair steps down
- s) works with the Co-ordinator, who acts as the Secretary of the Secretariat, and who maintains the Secretariat meeting minutes and correspondence on behalf of the PPN
- t) promotes the PPN and its Member Groups, amongst its Member Groups and in the wider community
- u) administers the PPN in accordance with best practice and to the highest possible standard as outlined in the PPN Guidelines and the Charities Governance Code (to be agreed between the Member Groups and approved by the Plenary)

- v) ensures the PPN is compliant with current legislation relating to General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), consistent with the County Council policy.
- w) manages and monitors the work of the PPN staff through the Staff Liaison Committee (which is a standing committee appointed from within the Secretariat) to enable them to deliver PPN objectives
- x) is fully involved in the Recruitment process of the PPN staff

5.3.ix Secretariat Subgroups

Subgroups of the Secretariat may be established at a Secretariat meeting for a specific project or purpose.

- a minimum of 3 Secretariat members are required to sit on a subgroup, with at least one female and one male member, wherever this is possible
- all subgroups must submit a written report at each Secretariat meeting
- unless it is a standing sub-committee, the term of a subgroup is from the Secretariat meeting where it is established to the next scheduled Secretariat meeting. The Secretariat may decide to extend subgroup's term but this requires to be reviewed at each Plenary
- the Secretariat will set the terms of reference of the Subgroup at the time of establishment. This will be agreed and included in the minutes. The terms of reference of the subgroup will state the membership, purpose and the decision-making capacity of the subgroup in carrying out its work
- the Secretariat may decide to invite non-Secretariat members to sit on a subgroup if they feel the addition would be appropriate. Any non-Secretariat members invited to sit on the subgroup must be in addition to the minimum of 3 Secretariat members and they must not outnumber Secretariat members
- a short report on the activity of any Secretariat subgroups will be included in the PPN Activity Report submitted to each Plenary meeting
- the quorum for a subgroup meeting is 2 Secretariat members of the subgroup
- a subgroup may meet virtually as well as physically

5.3.x Role of the Secretariat Rotating Chair

The Secretariat shall elect a rotating chair/ facilitator, who shall:

- a) agree the framework for Secretariat meetings with the Co-ordinator (e.g. timeframe, location, facilities etc.)
- b) agree the agenda of each Secretariat meeting with the Co-ordinator
- c) manage the progression of agenda items at each Secretariat meeting, the reaching of decisions, and the time allocated to each item
- d) review, agree and ensure the distribution of draft minutes in a timely fashion in conjunction with the resource worker
- e) ensure that approved minutes are made available on the PPN website
- f) normally act as the primary representative of the PPN network to external bodies or in emergency situations. This role may be delegated if necessary
- g) sign off on official PPN correspondence
- h) facilitate the Plenary meeting that takes place during their term

If the Secretariat is dissatisfied with the conduct or performance of the Rotating Chair, the Rotating Chair may be voted out of that role during the course of a scheduled Secretariat meeting, by a simple majority vote. A motion for such a vote must be submitted in writing prior to the meeting concerned.

5.4 Linkage Groups

Linkage Groups bring together PPN Member Groups with a common interest to discuss their diverse views and interests in a specific policy area such as arts, community, environment, heritage, housing, planning, social inclusion, transport or tourism (and more). They provide an opportunity for such Groups to work together on issues, to influence change in their area of interest, and potentially to have a real input into policy in their respective area of operation through advocating for policy change. Linkage Groups are an essential component of the work of the PPN.

Linkage Groups operate under the control of the PPN Plenary, and report to the PPN Secretariat.

Linkage Groups may exist to look at any and overlapping areas of policy. Often they coincide with the directorates of the County Council or Strategic Policy Committee briefs. They may be created to look at a particular, current or pressing issue of interest to PPN Member Groups. They can operate for as long as Member Groups wish to work on an issue and can then be moth-balled or wound up.

The Secretariat may decide to establish new Linkage Groups, subdivide current Linkage Groups or establish issue-based Linkage Groups in consultation with the existing Linkage Groups. Linkage Groups may also be established on an issue basis or as requested. Member Groups' registrations note the areas of interest of the Group, so all those that have a stated interest in an area that is to be the focus of a Linkage Group will be invited initially to get involved, and all Member Groups are notified of Linkage Groups that they may join via the Newsletter and other communications.

You can see the list of current [Linkage Groups <here>](#).

5.4.i Aim and Role of Linkage Groups

The aim and role of Linkage Groups is to:

- a) act as the representative, collective voice of community and voluntary, environmental and social inclusion organisations in Cork County on the relevant thematic area
- b) engage as an equal and independent partner and assert the rights of the sector to organise and structure its own participation in relevant arenas
- c) co-ordinate, enable and support the representation of the community and voluntary, environmental and social inclusion sectors in Cork County on various public and private structures through the nomination of Linkage Group members to relevant decision-making structures as PPN Representatives
- d) support the PPN representative(s) on the decision-making structure(s) through debating relevant issues, outlining the range of views in the sector, forming policy positions and priorities where possible, informing the position representatives are to take on issues, and discussing feedback on activity
- e) agree and implement a way of communicating with the PPN representative(s) and with each other, which is effective and realistic
- f) provide PPN Member Groups with similar interests the opportunity to meet, network, share ideas on issues and feed into policies that affect them
- g) use, review and update the PPN Community Issues Paper (generated in the development of the PPN [Vision for Community Wellbeing](#)) on an on-going basis, at least annually, providing PPN Members with the opportunity to develop and promote positions on policies relevant to the work of Linkage Groups
- h) develop a realistic work-plan to include specific projects that can be achieved at a local level, and which benefit the local community
- i) facilitate engagement with relevant state agencies such as Cork County Council, An Garda Síochána, HSE, Fáilte Ireland, etc.
- j) work collaboratively with other Linkage Groups and PPN representatives in furtherance of the aims of the PPN

- k) facilitate the sharing of information with interested PPN members from decision making structures
- l) work with and report on Linkage Group activity to the Secretariat, Plenary, and to other interested parties when required
- m) facilitate and enable PPN Members to articulate a diverse range of views and interests within the Local Government System and not to reduce or homogenise this diversity
- n) facilitate Member Groups to gain a deeper understanding of the local policy process
- o) facilitate any other action or engagement which the Linkage Group(s) consider appropriate to their remit and which is approved by the Plenary

5.4.ii Linkage Group membership

Every Linkage Group is open to all registered Member Groups (Full and Associate Members). On registering, new Member Groups are asked to specify which existing Linkage Group(s) they wish to be a member of. However, Linkage Group membership is open to all Member Groups, year-round and Member Groups are entitled to request formation of new and additional Linkage Groups.

All Member Groups are encouraged to participate in at least one Linkage Group.

Member Groups belonging to more than one Linkage Group are encouraged to send different representatives to each and may have more than one representative attend where they wish.

5.4.iii Responsibilities of the Linkage Group

Linkage Group members are expected to:

- a) operate in accordance with the principles and values of PPN
- b) make themselves aware of what the Boards or Committees they are linked to can and cannot do, have realistic expectations of what a PPN representative can achieve, and understand confidentiality issues which may arise
- c) be open to new organisations joining the Linkage Group, and to actively seek the input of all groups who have an interest in the area, particularly those who are traditionally socially excluded
- d) communicate and engage clearly and openly with the PPN representative(s) and other Linkage Group members, recognising that there may be differing views expressed on issues, and that the PPN representative(s) must bring the diversity of views to the board or committee
- e) take the time to read, absorb and understand communications that are received
- f) feed back to their Member Groups on the work of the Linkage Group(s) and board(s) or committee(s)
- g) inform the wider PPN of key issues and policy positions
- h) keep records of dates, attendance, outputs etc. for all meetings (virtual or face to face)
- i) minutes of meetings shall be approved at the next meeting and signed and dated by the Rotating Chair who is selected by the Linkage Group for a term of no more than 1 year.

5.4.iv Rights of the Linkage Group members are to:

Linkage Group members are entitled to

- a) receive relevant information about the work of the board or committee to help them to participate fully
- b) receive regular communications (at least as frequently as board or committee meetings are held) from the PPN Representative on matters such as:
 - o Dates of board or committee meetings.
 - o Agendas for board or committee meetings.

- Reports from board or committee meetings.
 - Items which require their input.
- c) have regular discussions by an agreed mechanism (face to face, video conference call, email, social media groups, etc.).
 - d) have relevant issues pursued in partnership with the Linkage Group Facilitator and relevant PPN representative(s).
 - e) have Linkage Group discussions facilitated in an open inclusive way, where the views of all members are accommodated

5.4.v Role of Linkage Group Facilitator

The general role of the Linkage Group Facilitator in a Linkage Group is to:

- a) monitor and guide the work of the Linkage Group (including ensuring follow up and progress between meetings)
- b) be the point of contact for the PPN for that Linkage Group
- c) plan the work of the Linkage Group to achieve its objectives
- d) be responsible for the functioning of their particular Linkage Group
- e) assist the Linkage Group members to understand their common goal
- f) provide leadership without taking over and remain neutral in all discussions
- g) encourage members of the group to take on tasks and get involved in progressing issues
- h) support PPN representatives who have been elected to policy committees

During a meeting of the Linkage Group, the Facilitator ensures that:

- i) the agenda for each meeting is followed
- j) focus is maintained on the relevant agenda item
- k) time boundaries are assigned to each agenda item
- l) business is progressed in an efficient manner

In the event of the Facilitator not being in attendance at a Linkage Group meeting, the Facilitator shall nominate an alternative prior to the meeting or, where an alternative is not nominated, those present shall appoint a Facilitator for the duration of the meeting by consensus or simple majority vote.

Linkage Group Facilitators are eligible to access representatives' training when this is available.

6.0 REPRESENTATIVES

The guidelines from the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (DRCD) make clear that the PPN is the “go to body for all structures and agencies who wish to benefit from community and voluntary sector experience. and expertise”. The PPN shall actively seek compliance on this with relevant agencies and bodies.

A Representative is any individual legitimately elected by the PPN to:

- represent the view of Member Groups at external committees, boards or other for a
- work on the Secretariat on behalf of all Member Groups
- be a facilitator for a Linkage Group, or
- carry out any other PPN Representative role

6.1 Principles governing PPN representation

The PPN will strive to spread representation widely in terms of gender, geography and type of Member Group; encouraging as participation by as diverse a range of candidates as possible.

Those taking up representative positions agree that:

- a) all contributions and views they express as PPN representatives shall be in line with the guidance or mandate from the Linkage Group(s) and the PPN [Vision for Community Wellbeing](#) (where these are present). It is the responsibility of the representative to engage with existing Linkage Group(s) and be familiar with the [Vision for Community Wellbeing](#)
- b) PPN representatives on Boards or Committees of Policy Making and Advisory Bodies of and for Cork County Council shall report to and take direction from their respective Linkage Group(s), where these exist

6.1.i Term of representative role

A representative is elected for a fixed term of 3 years to represent the issues of PPN members on an external board or committee. They may stand for re-election, but cannot hold a position on the same board or committee for more than two consecutive terms; a total of 6 years.

An individual shall only represent the PPN on one board or committee at a time. This does not include the Secretariat.

6.2 Role and responsibilities of the PPN Representative

All PPN representatives undertake to:

- a) assist in the organisation of and preparation of Linkage Group meetings and effective two-way communications with Linkage Group members (with the support of the resource worker)
- b) prepare thoroughly for, attend and participate actively in meetings of the Linkage Group(s) and board or committee, including any subgroups, to which they may be appointed
- c) bring forward the issues of the Linkage Group(s) to the board or committee for their consideration, including placing items on the agenda and feedback clearly using plain. Participate in meetings solely on behalf of PPN, leaving any personal, business or political interests outside
- d) work openly and collaboratively with the Linkage Group(s) to identify issues, research, develop policy proposals, etc. respecting the diversity of views expressed
- e) communicate regularly (at least as frequently as meetings are held) with the Linkage Group(s) on matters such as:
 - i. Dates of Board or Committee meetings
 - ii. Agendas for Board or Committee meetings
 - iii. Reports and Feedback from Board or Committee meetings
 - iv. Items which require their input or are of interest

- f) build positive relationships, network and work strategically with other board or committee members for the benefit of the PPN and the Linkage Group(s), including being able to compromise while retaining the core objective
- g) attend and participate fully in the Plenary, any representatives' forum meeting, relevant training or networking events organised by PPN or the board or committee
- h) comply with the PPN Code of Conduct at all times and portray the PPN and the Linkage Group in a positive and constructive way. Be open and honest in dealings with all stakeholders
- i) be able to use basic electronic communications effectively (i.e. email and internet browsing)

6.3 Rights of the PPN Representative*

Individuals acting as PPN representatives are entitled to expect to:

- a) have active engagement from the Secretariat, Linkage Group and Plenary, including timely responses to issues
- b) be heard and respected at both the Linkage Group and board or committee, with an appreciation that they are a volunteer
- c) be supported by both Linkage Group and board or committee members, understanding that PPN is a new and evolving structure
- d) in accordance with best practice, have access to an agreed outcome statement from meetings which can be circulated immediately afterwards.
- e) receive relevant training to enable them to participate effectively on the board or committee
- f) receive expenses for attending Board or Committee meetings including any subgroups and relevant training, in line with the PPN [Travel and Expenses Policy](#) (P10, p.65).
- g) have at least some PPN meetings held at a time and location which facilitates their attendance
- h) receive an induction pack for the board or committee on taking up appointment to include:
 - o Terms of reference
 - o Standing Orders and procedures
 - o meeting schedules, locations and times
 - o contact details for all Board or Committee members
- i) access to technical support where required
- j) receive as much notice as possible of meetings (dates and venues) and associated documentation (agenda, documents and reports to be read) in advance as permitted by the relevant standing orders of the committee or board
- k) have meetings conducted in a way that facilitates participation, open discussion and transparent decision making

**The PPN recognises and supports these rights and will seek a commitment from Cork County Council and all other bodies where PPN representation is sought to sign up and uphold these rights also wherever this has not been secured.*

6.4 Removal of Representatives

Any Member Group may make a complaint about a PPN Representative on any of the committees or boards if they believe that they fail or otherwise omit to:

- i. undertake their role, as laid down by this Constitution, in an appropriate manner
- ii. consistently attend the relevant meetings
- iii. report back to the Membership or Linkage Group
- iv. represent the relevant Linkage Group members appropriately

- v. comply with any written instruction

or where they believe a Representative represents their own interests or views or lobbies on behalf of their own organisation. Complaints should be submitted using the PPN [Grievance Procedure](#) (P8, p.50). A relevant Linkage Group, or Member Group of such a Linkage Group, may submit a complaint about that Representative.

Separately, if the Secretariat identify through normal monitoring of PPN activity, that a PPN representative may not be fulfilling their role as outlined above, they may choose to refer the matter to the relevant Linkage Group Facilitator for discussion at a Linkage Group meeting.

6.5 Code of Conduct for PPN Representatives

Member Groups and Representatives of the PPN shall always conduct themselves in a professional manner and in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution and the PPN [Code of Conduct](#) (P5, p.36)

Elected PPN Representatives are required to indicate their commitment to the PPN Code of Conduct by signing a copy of this document once elected.

7.0 HOW THE PPN IS FUNDED

The PPN is funded primarily through an annual grant from the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (DRCDG) and Cork County Council. This funding is ring-fenced for the development and maintenance of the PPN, most commonly including:

- Costs of employing staff (currently Co-ordinator and Support Worker, whole time equivalent)
- Provision of office space, infrastructure and materials for PPN staff
- Expenses incurred by the PPN in its activities
- Expenses for Secretariat members and PPN Representatives, where these cannot be recouped elsewhere

Spending must be for the purposes indicated above and in keeping with the PPN's [Annual Workplan](#).

The PPN budget is under the control of the PPN but is administered on its behalf by the Council as part of its Memorandum of Understanding with the PPN.

The PPN may access additional funds or resources for example for specific projects or access to training.

7.1 Expenditure

All expenditure shall be vouched by the PPN in accordance with standard financial procedures in place in Cork County Council.

The Council cannot request information outside these financial operating procedures or look to influence how the PPN spends its budget.

7.2 Financial Records

Financial records shall comply with accepted accounting standards and processes and the directions of funders.

The Secretariat will satisfy itself that financial records are being kept up to date and will receive a financial update from staff at each Secretariat meeting.

A copy of the Financial Statement, approved by Secretariat, shall be circulated to all Member Groups prior to AGM.

7.3 PPN Representative Expenses

PPN Representatives are entitled to recover certain expenses that they incur in carrying out of their duties. The expenses that may be reclaimed and the rates applying are set out in the PPN [Travel and Expenses Policy](#) (P10, p.65).

7.3 Accountability

The Secretariat is responsible for ensuring a clear line of accountability and decision-making at Plenaries. It must also ensure adherence to circulars from the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (DRCDG), intended to support best practice in PPNs.

The Secretariat also oversees completion of audits of its activities as requested by DRCDG.

8.0 COMPLAINTS

The PPN recognises that, from time to time, we can make mistakes, and that people may feel that our performance has been unsatisfactory. The PPN [Grievance Procedure](#) (P8, p.50) is designed for us to learn, respond and improve how we operate and to manage any complaints we may receive. The PPN is committed to providing a high-quality response to complaints to our staff, volunteers and others that engage with us.

All complaints will be handled according to the PPN [Grievance Procedure](#) (P8, p.59)

9.0 SERVICE OF NOTICES

A notice may be given to any Member Group either through handing it to a known member of that Group, by personal delivery or sending it by prepaid registered post, or by sending it by electronic means to the registered email address of that Member Group as per the most recent records of the PPN.

The failure of any Member Group to receive notice of meeting shall not invalidate the proceedings at or of the meeting.

10.0 MAKING CHANGES TO OUR CONSTITUTION

A proposal to amend the Constitution may be made:

- by the Secretariat
- by 30 or more active Full Member Groups within 10 days of the date of the Plenary.

The proposed change must be sent to all Member Groups and put on the agenda of the next Annual General Meeting or an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Plenary convened for that purpose.

A proposal must be received by the Secretariat with sufficient notice if it is to be added to the agenda of a scheduled Plenary meeting (see [5.2.iii above](#)); this has to be prepared and sent out *at least* 10 days prior to the meeting. In the event that no scheduled Plenary is due to be held in the near future, those submitting a proposal may indicate if they wish a Extraordinary General Meeting to be called, or that the proposal can wait until the next scheduled Plenary.

Proposed change is passed by simple majority vote of those present at the Plenary meeting concerned.

A proposed change to the Constitution comes into effect immediately the proposal is passed.

11. ADOPTION OF CONSTITUTION

This Constitution was adopted at a Cork County Public Participation Network Plenary held on

Signed on behalf of Cork County Public Participation Network:

Rotating Chair

Date approved by Plenary: 23/04/2026