

Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council

Review of Strategic Policy Committees 2014 – 2019

This survey submission was compiled by Laura Howe, DLR PPN manager on behalf of DLR PPN.

Information for this submission was taken from:

- Workshop held with DLR PPN representatives in April 2016, facilitated by Chris McInerney and Cian Finn of the University of Limerick.
- Meeting of DLR PPN representatives held before the November 2016 Plenary meeting.
- Meeting of DLR PPN representatives held before the April 2017 Plenary meeting.
- 2 meetings of DLR PPN representatives held in February 2018.
- Conversations between the DLR PPN manager and individual DLR PPN representatives undertaken for this survey submission.
- Feedback from the DLR PPN Secretariat.

Function of DLR PPN as it relates to the SPCs

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown PPN is a stakeholder in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council's Strategic Policy Committees. Our purpose is to facilitate the participation of communities, through our member groups, in the local authority's decision and policy-making processes. Therefore the success of the SPCs is of key importance to us.

Our role and responsibility to our members in the SPC process is to ensure that our members and representatives have the opportunity for meaningful participation in the SPCs.

Government guidelines lay down the process of how PPN members should participate in SPCs. This is through linkage groups - groups of PPN members interested in a specific policy area dealt with by a local authority committee.

These linkage groups of PPN members elect representatives to sit on the local authority's committees to represent PPN member's views on the policy area covered by the committees. The PPN representatives are expected to report back to the linkage group on the work of the SPCs for discussion and deliberation by the linkage group members. In this way participation and feedback is facilitated between the committees, the PPN representatives and the PPN members.

SPC Member Feedback

Item	What worked well?	What could we improve?
Roles and Responsibilities		<p>Because of the purpose and functions of DLR PPN set out above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The process for the PPN to nominate and elect representatives onto



		<p>committees takes time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PPN needs to form linkage groups for the policy areas covered by the SPCs. The policy areas covered by the SPCs are not confirmed until the SPC scheme is agreed. This is expected to happen at the June council meeting. If the PPN is expected to have representatives ready to be approved at the July Council meeting, this isn't enough time. <p>PPN representatives from the 3 different sectors (Community & Voluntary, Social Inclusion and Environmental) are expected to have specific expertise in areas decided during the development of the SPC Scheme. In the previous SPC scheme some of the areas of expertise were incompatible with the sector. The PPN would welcome an input into designing the upcoming SPC scheme to avoid a reoccurrence of this incompatibility.</p> <p>Our responsibility to the local authority is to ensure there are PPN representatives who are willing and able to engage in the SPC process on a voluntary basis. Therefore, SPCs need to be able to demonstrate that they are worth engaging with and are capable of achieving positive change.</p> <p>Managing expectations is important to avoid SPC members becoming disengaged. It should be made clear to all members of the committee what they can realistically expect SPCs to achieve, for example in relation to how national policy may impact local policy.</p> <p>There needs to be clarity about how Strategic Policy Committees achieve things, what the process is for making decisions, where the decision-making power rests and how decisions come to be enacted.</p>
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	<p>Having a good chairperson on an SPC is vital to their success. Some of the chairpersons on previous SPCs have been excellent.</p>	<p>The attitude and abilities of the chairperson play an important part in how PPN representatives experience their role on the SPCs, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling respected by and equal to other members of the committee. • Having an opportunity to share their experience and knowledge. • Feeling that their expertise and knowledge is used. • Knowing that their time, as volunteers, is valued. <p>PPN representatives are often coming into a culture and environment they are not familiar with. A positive atmosphere in the SPC makes members want to keep engaging with it.</p>



		<p>Suggestions on how these issues can be improved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for SPC chairpersons on how to run effective, inclusive and collaborative meetings. • Chairpersons welcoming committee members and giving members of the SPC the opportunity to introduce themselves as a standard procedure. • An informal meeting between the chairperson and DLR PPN representatives before they attend their first SPC meeting to discuss the SPC. • Chairpersons briefly outlining procedures and protocols that will be followed during the meeting.
Meeting Management	<p>The timing of the meetings from 5pm-7pm is reasonably accessible for those who work during the day.</p>	<p>As mentioned previously, one of the key functions of a PPN representative on an SPC is to gather and represent the views of PPN members.</p> <p>Therefore it is important that documentation that will be discussed and deliberated on in an SPC meeting is shared with PPN representatives in a timely manner that allows them to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) inform and engage with PPN members in their linkage groups and b) submit requests for information and items for the future workplan based on the engagement with the linkage groups. <p>The current minimum of 2 weeks is not enough time for this.</p> <p>Suggestions on how these issues can be improved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure as much as possible that meeting venues are accessible and convenient for all members of the committee. • Use nameplates for all members of the SPC. • Ensure venues have good acoustics,



		<p>or take steps to ensure that all members can hear what is being said.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change the meeting management process so that meeting documentation can be distributed more than 2 weeks before the SPC meeting.
Communications	<p>Strategic Policy Committees are a source of good quality, useful and relevant information for PPN representatives and PPN members.</p> <p>They offer good insight into the different services that the local authority provides.</p> <p>Presentations are usually informative and the work of the local authority's staff in putting together and presenting this information is appreciated.</p> <p>Council staff can be very helpful to PPN representatives when representatives make contact with them about SPC business but it can take representatives a long time to discover this.</p>	<p>Clarity is needed regarding the ways in which PPN representatives can input into the work of the SPC and the procedures, rules and processes for doing so.</p> <p>DLR PPN representatives have reported issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lack of clarity about the process by which items get on to the SPC's agenda and future workplan. • A lack of explanation as to why an item failed to make the agenda or why a suggestion did not subsequently result in action. • Being uncertain of if or how they can give a presentation at an SPC meeting. • Being unclear about what is an acceptable topic for an SPC meeting. • Long delays both in getting an item onto the agenda and in it being discussed. <p>PPN representatives want be able to give of their best on the SPCs. They feel they are being listened to and are contributing when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their comments are minuted • Their input is discussed • They receive feedback • They can see a result or outcome to their input. <p>When PPN representatives make suggestions or recommendations into pieces of work it is essential that they</p>



		<p>are given feedback with regard to how these suggestions are being considered and whether action is being taken on them. Whether suggestions are taken on board or not, an explanation of why their suggestion has not been included is essential. This is so they feel their time on the SPC is not wasted.</p> <p>One of the key functions of a PPN representative on an SPC is to feed information from the SPC back to PPN members for discussion and deliberation. To date this has been problematic due to a lack of clarity about what information shared within SPCs is confidential and what can be shared with PPN members.</p> <p>Presentations and updates frequently appear on the SPCs' agendas. Though informative, they can relate to matters that have already been decided elsewhere, with little opportunity for meaningful input or decision making by SPC members.</p> <p>Suggestions on how these issues can be improved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance for PPN representatives about how decisions are made on SPCs and how the decision is progressed to an outcome. This could also go into the user-friendly handbook mentioned previously or be part of induction training for committee members. • Use plain English and accessible language whenever possible, for example in documents and presentations. If acronyms are being used provide a list explaining what the acronyms mean. • A specific liaison person in the local authority for PPN representatives to contact with any questions relating to the SPC. The liaison could meet new
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		<p>representatives before the first meeting and talk through key procedures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A guaranteed response to any questions addressed to the liaison within an agreed time. • Feedback, for example from the chairperson, on why a representative's attempt to input into the SPC was unsuccessful. • Regular opportunities for committee members to give feedback and suggest improvements on how the committees are working, for example once a year. • PPN business as a regular item on the agenda. • PPN representatives being given the opportunity to make a presentation on their own area of expertise as it relates to strategic policy. • Changing the style of minuting SPC meetings to more clearly reflect what is discussed. • SPC chairpersons making it clear at the SPC meeting what information is confidential and what can be shared. • More frequent meetings of the SPCs, and/or more effective working practices within the SPCs , for example working groups on specific issues. • Look at ways in which more business is referred to the SPCs by the Council and the Corporate Policy Group. • Give more time for meaningful debate and discussion on issues raised during presentations and updates.
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear and open about the preliminary and background work that happens prior to items being brought to SPC members.
Any further comments	<p>Strategic Policy Committees present a good opportunity for PPN representatives to meet and network with elected members and local authority staff and to come into contact with decision-makers.</p> <p>PPN members have consistently demonstrated a willingness to contribute to the SPCs and can make a considerable contribution.</p> <p>Strategic Policy Committees have tremendous potential as a system for involving communities in local government's strategic policy making and as a forum for discussion and engagement on critical topics. It is early days and so problems with the operation of the system are inevitable but not insurmountable. We believe that effective parameters that allow all members of an SPC to make a positive contribution can be created through consultation and engagement with all stakeholders in the SPCs.</p>	<p>DLR PPN welcomes this opportunity to have an input into the operation of the SPCs. As mentioned previously the success of the SPCs is vital to DLR PPN. We believe DLR PPN, as a network of over 520 community groups active in the county, can be an asset to the SPCs.</p> <p>A number of suggestions on how the SPCs can be improved have been offered in this survey. We would welcome the opportunity to collaborate and work with the local authority on implementing these suggestions where appropriate, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing and delivering training for SPC members. • Developing a user-friendly, plain English handbook for SPC members. <p>The memorandum of understanding between DLR PPN and the local authority states that the local authority will: <i>"Work with the PPN to agree, adopt and implement a protocol for all committees/ decision making bodies with PPN representatives that will enable the representatives to engage fully, taking in to consideration timing, location, documentation etc."</i></p> <p>We would welcome the opportunity that this review of the SPCs presents to work with the local authority on this as an output of the review.</p> <p>We would like to request that feedback and updates on the outcomes of this survey are made available to all those who have submitted to it.</p>

