

Cork City Public Participation Network Constitution (DRAFT)

February 2024

Preamble

Participatory Democracy is the model of democracy in which citizens are provided with power to make political decisions. At the centre of democracy is our participation in public life, and our right to influence the decisions that affect us and our communities. Open and inclusive policy making increases public well-being, improves transparency and openness, builds community capacity, and leads to increased buy-in and better decision-making.

Public Participation Networks were established on the recommendation of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement which published its report in February 2014. This report contains a detailed review of literature and practice in relation to participatory democracy.

Ireland signed up to the Aarhus Convention in 1998 guaranteeing 'rights of access to public participation in decision-making'. The convention states that the role of participatory democracy is 'to contribute to the protection of the right of every person of present and future generations to live in an environment adequate to their health and well-being.

Objective

The Public Participation Network represents and empowers community and voluntary groups, clubs and organisations in Cork City that work in a voluntary, cooperative or not-for-profit basis for the benefit of the community.

The PPN aims to effect decisions and create policy that improves quality of life, wellbeing and opportunity in the local authority area of Cork City. The PPN supports and creates representation to engage in the process of political decision-making on behalf of the community. Cork City PPN plays a central role as an organisation through which Cork City Council and other decision-making bodies may actively seek the participation of those affected by local decision-making.

The day-to-day running of the PPN is administered by a Secretariat of members and implemented by PPN Staff who report to the Secretariat to implement the decisions of the membership and assist membership groups and individuals to be effective in their roles.

Cork City PPN operates transparently; actively seeking regular engagement with all members in the decision-making process and empowering members to achieve the aims of the PPN by protecting the process of meaningful and effective participatory democracy.

This Constitution is supported by the PPN Handbook and associated guidance books of the PPN Handbook on Representatives & Secretariat also referencing the PPN Handbook on PPN Workers and the Local Authority.

The Electoral Colleges

CCPPN consists of three equal Electoral Voting Colleges as follows:

The Social Inclusion College

A Social Inclusion Organisation is one whose main activity is working to improve the life chances and opportunities of those who are marginalised in society, such as people living in poverty or in unemployment, using community development approaches to build sustainable communities, where values of equality and inclusion are promoted and human rights are respected. It does not include formal education (schools, colleges), or large institutional health or social service providers.

The Environmental College

An Environmental Organisation is one whose primary objectives and activities are environmental, such as the pursuit of ecological protection or of environmental sustainability and includes community groups that work to meaningfully improve their local environment, enhance biodiversity and reduce their resources. The Environmental College includes groups that strive to promote protection and enhancement of both the built and natural environment. Access to this college is by application through the Irish Environmental Network.

The Community and Voluntary College

A Community and Voluntary Organisation is one whose primary activity is other than social inclusion or environmental protection or environmental sustainability and, amongst others, covers groups working in the following areas: tidy towns, arts and culture, sport and recreation, services for children and young people etc.

CCPPN is bound by this Constitution which aims to support the members and the organisation to thrive as a friendly and supportive organisation equally concerned by effective outcomes for the membership and the well-being of members. The governance of Cork City PPN and the rights of members are based on this Constitution.

Cork City PPN refers to the PPN Handbook to support the primacy of the Constitution.

1. Name

The name of the organisation is Cork City Public Participation Network (CCPPN).

2. Mission Statement

Cork City Public Participation Network is the collective voice for community and voluntary, environmental, and social inclusion organisations in Cork City, its purpose is to improve people's well-being by meaningfully involving the community in local decision-making.

3. Objectives

- 3.1 To provide an open, inclusive and transparent, participatory structure for Community and Voluntary, Environmental, and Social Inclusion groups in Cork City.
- 3.2 To represent the membership and wider community and encourage and enable public participation and develop influence in local decision-making and planning of services.
- 3.3 To facilitate the selection and inclusion of community representatives to decision-making bodies and to support those representatives to be effective in their roles.
- 3.4 To foster, in particular, the inclusion of and empowerment of groups and organisations with a focus on tackling disadvantage and social exclusion, including rural and urban isolation.
- 3.5 To support the member groups of CCPPN to develop their capacity to participate effectively in CCPPN activities, ensuring they are included, and that their voices and concerns are heard.
- 3.6 To facilitate a broad range of ideas, experience, suggestions and proposals sought from CCPPN member groups to inform policies, plans and processes being developed by agencies and decision-makers.
- 3.7 To promote and facilitate opportunities for networking, communication and efficient information exchange between environmental, community and voluntary, and social inclusion groups and between these groups and other decision-making bodies including Cork City Council.
- 3.8 To develop and support the role of Representatives in their mandate to represent the interests of CCPPN member groups and achieve successful outcomes.
- 3.9 To promote and make known the Cork City Public Participation Network and its aims and objectives to potential members and to wider networks.
- 3.10 To develop and promote the work of CCPPN to be clearly recognised, acknowledged and understood by local decision-making bodies and stakeholders.
- 3.11 To contribute to and influence the development of collective wellbeing for the community and within the administrative process of the PPN, supporting community wellbeing process for this and future generations.

- 3.12 To identify issues of collective concern and to advocate and influence policy locally and nationally in relation to these issues.
- 3.13 To develop and revise a regular Strategic Plan that the goals of the Membership Groups and considered the experience of Representatives.
- 3.14 To uphold the detail of the constitution.

4. Principles & Values

CPPN and its member organisations are committed to addressing collective issues of the member groups in a friendly, inclusive, fair and supportive way focusing on defining and achieving successful outcomes.

Cork City Public Participation Network is:

- 4.1 **Inclusive** of volunteer-led groups in the area, and actively looks to include groups that might not otherwise be included or who might not often have their voice heard.
- 4.2 **Participatory**, open, welcoming, respectful, willing to work together and be supportive of each other. CCPPN encourages participation by member groups in all its work.
- 4.3 **Welcoming** of new member groups. The PPN exercises clear communications to and from member groups using as wide a range of communication methods as possible to make sure that their reach is as broad as possible.
- 4.4 **Independent** from the local authority and of any special interests. As CCPPN is accountable to the Local Authority for its budget and maintains vigilant process to remain independent.
- 4.5 **Transparent** in everything that it does. It communicates openly, regularly and clearly with all member groups.
- 4.6 **Diverse**; recognising that the three Electoral Colleges are made up of people and member groups that have a wide range of different views, experiences, and opinions.
- 4.7 **Accountable** to its member groups by maintaining and developing fair, representative governance policies and procedures in place.

5. Membership

CCPPN is open to any group working on a voluntary, cooperative or not-for-profit basis for the benefit of the community within Cork City. Members may be a community and voluntary group or club, environmental group and any organisation addressing issues of social exclusion. Applications for membership are considered under the membership criteria:

- 5.1 Full members groups should be volunteer led, in existence for at least 6 months; should have at least three registered members; meet regularly; be open to new members; and ideally have a committee and hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM).
- 5.2 Member Organisations must support the aims, objectives and principles set out in this Constitution.
- 5.3 Member Organisations must carry out their activities in an open and transparent manner.
- 5.4 Member Organisations must have a base in and/or be active in Cork City and/or have a significant proportion of activities or members in the Cork City Local Authority Area.
- 5.5 Member Organisations must complete and return a membership application together with their Constitution, set of rules or financial procedures and minutes of their most recent AGM or activity report from the last year.
- 5.6 To ensure a separation of the functions, City Councillors, TDs, Senators, and MEPs may not be the CCPPN contact point for Member Organisations.
- 5.7 Member Organisations should be non-party political. Individual members may not be current political candidates. They may also not be or have been professional politicians. They may also not be actively working in Local Government employment in the previous 5 years.
- 5.8 Member organisations must practice equality on the grounds protected under the Equality Acts (1998-2015) and any subsequent amendments or additions to those Acts.
- 5.9 An organisation's membership of the CCPPN may be reviewed by the CCPPN if the organisation claims to speak on behalf of or represent CCPPN without mandate. Review is subject to process including a unanimous secretariat vote to add to a Plenary agenda.
- 5.10 A Member Organisation ceases to be a member of CCPPN if the organisation no longer qualifies under the conditions laid down for membership.
- 5.11 Organisations, which at the time of application, meet all other criteria except some elements of sections 5.1 and/or 5.4 may apply for Associate Membership.
- 5.12 The following are not eligible for membership of CCPPN:
 - State or semi-state bodies.
 - Groups who have representation through other pillars of social partnership, e.g. trade unions, farming and business organisations.

- Groups based on singular local issues - for example, groups based on opposition to a particular local planning application.

5.13 The Director of Community, Cultural and Placemaking of Cork City Council Executive and their nominees may attend, CCPPN meetings and contribute to discussions. The director has no voting rights.

5.14 Associate Membership

Associate members may:

- Attend CCPPN training and events.
- Attend Linkage Groups and Plenary meetings and contribute to discussion. However, voting rights are not extended to Associate members.
- Receive information like the CCPPN newsletter and CCPPN annual reports.
- Associate Member Organisations may not put forward motions and do not have the power to make nominations or exercise voting rights.

5.15 Associate Membership Criteria

Associate membership of CCPPN is open to groups and organisations not eligible for full membership but who:

- Engage with or support CCPPN.
- Do not yet reach the criteria for membership but are working towards achieving full membership.
- 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 Cork City Public Participation Network policies and constitution.
- Have a Branch, Group, Association, etc. established in Cork City for at least one year if they are a national or regional organisation.

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

- University departments, research centres, colleges, third-level groups or associations.
- Charitable trusts and foundations.
- Other civil society, voluntary and community organisations.

6. The Plenary

The Plenary is the main decision-making body of CCPPN Member Groups to make decisions, present proposals, review how CCPPN is working and to set the work agenda for the coming period. The Plenary should, unless in exceptional circumstances, meet at least twice a year. The role of the Plenary includes:

- to establish common goals between the membership groups.
- to review working practices and consultation practices.
- to establish and agree PPN policies.
- to review the achievements and outcomes of PPN objectives.
- to give voice to the concerns of the membership.
- to facilitate agenda items proposed by members for discussion.
- to hold and ratify PPN elections.
- to connect the membership with the Representatives.
- to develop and agree the annual Workplan and Budget.

6.1 Notice of a Plenary must be at least 21 days in advance of the Plenary meeting.

6.2 Notice of a Plenary meeting should include details of any elections that may take place.

6.3 There must be a Quorum of members for the Plenary to agree decisions.

6.3.1. The quorum for a Plenary meeting shall be 15 full-member groups (i.e. a minimum of 15 persons representing 15 separate full-member organisations) and must include at least one member from each of the three Electoral Colleges.

6.3.2. If a quorum is not achieved at any meeting, there are two options that may be explored to proceed:

Option A

The meeting is postponed and rescheduled for a more suitable date, no later than one month after the date of the original meeting. In the event that a quorum is not present at the rescheduled meeting, and provided that those in attendance consist of a simple majority (that is, half plus one) of all groups registered to attend the meeting, the number of participants present is deemed to be the quorum and the meeting may be validly held. No objections to proceedings, including resolutions, ratifications and decisions, of the rescheduled meeting are permitted on the basis that there was no valid quorum in attendance at the original scheduled meeting.

Option B

Determine that the current attendance at the Plenary is sufficient for the Plenary to proceed. Decisions made at this Plenary are validly passed by a simple majority (that is, half plus one) of those in attendance. In addition, if over 50% of the Secretariat members terms have expired by the date of the holding of the Plenary meeting, or the rescheduled Plenary meeting, whichever shall apply, the requirement that the quorum include four Secretariat members ceases to apply.

- 6.4. All members and staff should register to attend meetings.
- 6.5. An Extraordinary Plenary Meeting (EPM) may be called by the Secretariat or by notice in writing by 3 full Member Organisations to the staff of CCPPN, who will then circulate the meeting notice to the members and Secretariat. At least 21 day notice shall be given of an Extraordinary Plenary and the notice must clearly and concisely specify the business to be discussed at the meeting. Only the business for which an extra. Plenary meeting has been called can be discussed at this meeting. All other matters should be referred to the next Plenary meeting for discussion.

7. Representatives

- 7.1 CCPPN elects Representatives to sit on committees and organisations on behalf of the Member Organisations of the network. To be eligible for election as a representative of CCPPN a person must:
 - Be a member of and nominated by a Cork City Public Participation Network full Member Organisation.
 - Committed to the aims, objectives, and principles of the PPN.
 - Available to attend the meetings of the relevant body that they are to sit on.
 - Represent the PPN before, their own Municipal District or area, their College and their group.
 - Willing to uphold, support and defend the constitution, policies and processes of CCPPN.
 - Able to articulate, discuss, debate and negotiate on behalf of the PPN.
 - Present the views and policies of CCPPN to the committee on which they serve and ensure that these views are considered in the decision-making processes.
 - Report in writing on present issues of relevance to the voluntary-run groups so the PPN may inform others and reach a collective opinion or course of action.
 - Advise CCPPN in writing of issues which require a response, formulation of policy or other action.
 - Consider ideas and information from CCPPN through a Linkage Group, Plenary Meeting, or Secretariat on how CCPPN be represented, and goals may be achieved.
 - Attend CCPPN Plenary meetings, relevant Linkage Group meetings and joint meetings between the Secretariat and CCPPN Representatives.
- 7.2 New Representatives are offered an induction process on taking up their position.

8. The Secretariat

- 8.1 A Secretariat of nine members is elected by full Member Organisations at a Plenary meeting. The Secretariat is a flat structure without elected officers. The purpose of the Secretariat is:

- To represent and implement the decisions of the Plenary.
- To administer the day to day running of the CCPPN between Plenary meetings.
- To inform Member Groups and Representatives of developments relevant to their groups.
- To develop CCPPN as a collective voice for community groups in the area.
- To support and engage with CCPPN Representatives to develop the goals of the PPN to be achieved and laid out in the Work Plan.
- To ensure that decisions are administered with the mandate of the membership by regularly and consistently seeking membership consultation on decisions and by maintaining transparent process.
- To seek regular input and guidance from the Membership and pursue and report on meaningful achieved goals and outcomes for the PPN.
- To facilitate guide and support the Resource Workers / Staff to achieve the objectives of CCPPN.
- To implement the Annual Work Plan objectives and demonstrate achievements and outcomes of the previous year.
- To develop and implement a Strategic Plan and promote the PPN and Membership.
- To maintain a Flat Structure in the Cork City Public Participation Network and fair representation for Members.

8.2 The Secretariat meets a minimum of six times per year or as deemed necessary.

8.3 The quorum for Secretariat meetings is half or more of the current members.

8.4 The Secretariat strives to makes decisions by consensus. If a consensus cannot be reached, those present will may make decisions by way of a simple majority vote as long as there is a sufficient quorum in attendance (i.e. half of the membership of the Secretariat). In the event of a tied vote the rotating Facilitator of the Secretariat has the casting vote.

8.5 New Secretariat members are offered an induction process on taking up their position.

9. Finances

- 9.1 CCPPN finances are administered and monitored by the Secretariat. Some financial functions may be partly administered by an independent host / Cork City community organisation holding an agreed Memorandum of Understanding and in line with their financial policy presented to the Secretariat. The Secretariat must operate robust financial controls and records with regard to all income and expenditure.
- 9.2 True accounts are kept of all sums of money received and expended by CCPPN and accounts are made available to all members prior to the Plenary meeting.
- 9.3 The Secretariat is required to seek available funding on behalf of the membership and to account for unspent budget to the membership annually.

10. Resignations

Secretariat Members and Representatives are required to resign their position if they:

- Are no longer a member of the CCPPN Member Organisation that nominated them.
- No longer have the formal support of their nominating Member Organisation.
- Consistently fail to attend three consecutive meetings of the Secretariat and / or committees they were elected to without informed reasonable explanation.
- Declare as a candidate for local, general or European elections.
- Seek employment as Coordinator or Staff of the CCPPN
- Are in serious breach of the Constitution or Code of Conduct.

11. Elections, Nominations and Voting

- 11.1 Nominations for CCPPN Representative roles and seats on the Secretariat are invited by communication with member groups.
- 11.2 When the number of nominations received exceeds the number of seats available, a ballot is held.
- 11.3 Each full Member Organisation is entitled to one vote only and must have a representative present to cast that vote.
- 11.4 Individuals can only represent and vote on behalf of one full Member Organisation at any Plenary meeting.

12. Election to The Secretariat

There are 9 possible seats on the Secretariat, which are filled as follows:

- 12.1 Full Member Organisations from each of three Electoral Colleges; Community and Voluntary; Environmental; and Social Inclusion elect three Representatives each.
- 12.2 Election is for a term of up to three years.
- 12.3 Members of the Secretariat who are standing down are eligible for re-election after a period of one year.
- 12.4 Members may only serve two consecutive terms on the Secretariat. After the two terms they must step down and not seek re-election for one year. In total, a member shall not serve more than a total of nine years on the Secretariat.
- 12.5 It is preferable that Secretariat resignations are delayed until the notification to the membership of new elections, to prevent a significant turnover of Secretariat members at any one time.
- 12.6 CCPPN encourages a balance of gender on the Secretariat including by notification of gender of secretariat members on notification of elections to the secretariat.
- 12.7 Member Organisation may have one person on the Secretariat only at any time.

13. Election of Representatives

- 13.1 Representative posts are ratified at the Plenary following election process.
- 13.2 Representatives may be nominated by qualifying Linkage Groups once a transparent voting process is enacted. Candidates are ratified at the Plenary.
- 13.3 If a Representative may not continue in their role, the Secretariat can contact the relevant Linkage Group seeking nominations for a new Representative.
- 14.1. Members of the Secretariat and Linkage Group Facilitators of CCPPN may be elected to a representative role. Linkage Group Facilitators may not serve as a Representative for the Linkage Group they serve on. A member group shall have only one Representative nominated as a PPN Representative on one decision-making committee (not including the Secretariat/Linkage Group Facilitators).
- 13.4 Election for Linkage Group Facilitators and Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) is for a term of up to three years. Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) are 5-year terms in order to correspond with the timespan of SPCs of Local Government elections.
- 13.5 The Colleges of the PPN are equally represented, in as far as is achievable and practical, in the apportioning of Representatives.

- 13.6 A person can hold only one Public Participation Network representative role on a decision-making committee.
- 13.7 Representatives may only serve two consecutive terms in the same role.
- 13.8 In total, a Representative may serve only a total of ten years on decision-making committees onto which CCPN nominates Representatives.

14. Reviewing The Constitution

- 14.2. The Secretariat ensures that a formal review of the Cork City Public Participation Network constitution takes place at least every 3 years or as and when the membership decides.
- 14.3. A full Member Organisation may put forward a motion to amend the Constitution accompanied by a statement outlining the reasoning behind the amendment beyond the required 3 year review period.
- 14.4. Any proposed motion to amend the Constitution must be supported by at least 2 other full Member Groups.
- 14.5. Motions to amend the Constitution must be made in writing to the Secretariat 21 days in advance of a notification of a Plenary meeting.
- 14.6. Member Organisations must be informed of any motions to amend the Constitution at the notification of the Plenary date at least 21 days in advance.
- 14.7. Motions to amend the Constitution must be discussed at a Plenary meeting and shall require a quorum of full Member groups entitled to vote to ratify change.

End.