

Cork City Public Participation Network

Code of Conduct (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 Code of Conduct 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.

1. Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct applies to all members of the Cork City Public Participation Network and specifically to those elected to a Representative Role or as a Secretariat Member acting on behalf of the entire PPN membership.

The code outlines the standards by which members including Representative and Secretariat members should adhere to in carrying out their roles, when interacting with or acting on behalf of the Cork City Public Participation Network. Staff are equally required to adhere to the code of conduct by remaining impartial in decision making without conflict with employment law.

All members and members with any representative role including Secretariat role have a duty of care and responsibility to act in the best communal interests of CCPPN complying with this Code of Conduct and the provisions of the Constitution. Maintaining integrity, being honest and truthful and respecting others is a requirement of all conduct within and on behalf of CCPPN particularly when dealing with fellow members and colleagues and equally with external individuals and agencies. Each person associated with the CCPPN is a part of a collective voice and may not be recognised individually in documents or authorships of documents to protect the PPN from issues of perceived bias.

2. The Code of Conduct - Rights of Members

The Code of Conduct encourages lively discussion, flexibility of process and ensures the rights of Members to speak and be heard and to set the agenda for discussion, work plans and the Plenary Agenda. A code of conduct equally protects the rights of individuals to meaningfully question process and ways of doing and being within the PPN to ensure that it may adapt to be more fair and effective. It is not the purpose of a Code of Conduct to be used to limit or prevent discussion or the evolution of the PPN towards further effectiveness and increased successful outcomes. Above all the well-being of Members must guide the implementation of the Code of Conduct to have a voice and equally to maintain the reputation of the CCPPN and to act on of breaches of the code particularly when of a serious nature. No member has the right to prevent another member from assuming the title of and carrying out their elected role.

3. Principles & Values

CCPPN 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. All members commit to and promise to comply with the fundamental values that underpin the activities of CCPPN.

Cork City Public Participation Network is:

3.1 **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.

3.2 **Participatory**, open, welcoming, respectful, willing to work together and be supportive of each other. CCPPN encourages participation by member groups in all its work.

3.3 **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.

3.4 **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.

3.5 **Transparent** in everything that it does. It communicates openly, regularly and clearly with all member groups.

3.6 **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.

3.7 **Accountable** to its member groups by maintaining and developing fair, representative governance policies and procedures in place.

4. Accountability

The actions of Members, Representatives and Secretariat Members and their interactions with others stand the test of scrutiny by the public and the electorate and the institutions and organisations of the country and city that may by degrees hold them to account. This requires that each member is accountable for their actions, behaves respectfully to others and does not use the organisation for personal gain or achieve any gain beyond improving their own well-being and experience. Members should be aware that bias is not acceptable in their actions and also that perceived bias due to their actions is also to be avoided completely. In their role as CCPPN Members, Representatives and Secretariat Members they:

- Commit to carry out their role without bias or perceived bias.
- Commit to carry out their role without seeking or attaining personal gain.

- Commit to compliance with fair and reasonable governance in the CCPPN and in the Community and Voluntary Sector generally.
- Comply with CCPPN policy and procedures making changes within defined and agreed process.
- Act only within the law and maintaining defined regulations and guidance.
- Must maintain the reputation of the PPN through their actions and presentation.
- Participate in relevant training and development opportunities.
- Respectfully support the PPN Staff / administration employees of the PPN in carrying out their role.
- Facilitate and tolerate fair, meaningful and challenging discourse with an openness to change respecting the views of others without undue disruption within a process of discussion and debate.

5. Conflicts of Interest

A Conflict of Interest is any form of personal interest which may affect or be perceived to affect, an individual's impartiality in decision making.

A Conflict of Interest can arise when someone has or pursues personal interests, goals, aims, personal favour, gain or represents loyalties which could be, or could be seen to be, at odds with the interests of the PPN.

Personal interests include the interests of a relative or connected person or organisation.

In accordance with the Ethics Act 2005, a member must disclose any pecuniary or other beneficial interest in, or material to, any matter which is to be considered by CCPPN Secretariat, CCPPN Plenary or a Committee or Board on which they sit as a CCPPN Representative.

PPN Representatives, Secretariat Members & Members must declare any conflicts of interest they may have.

All members shall:

- Act in the best interests of CCPPN without bias or favour either to themselves or others and be mindful of the concept of perceived bias.
- Declare any potential conflict of interest or any such circumstance as may be viewed

by others as conflicting as soon as it arises.

- Abide by decisions of the Secretariat, Plenary, Group, Committee or Board on which they sit complying with any requirements made regarding potential conflicts of interest.
- Resign as appropriate if acting or found to be acting outside the Code of Conduct.

6. Secretariat Members - Conflicts of Interest

Conflict of Interest is addressed at the beginning of each Secretariat Meeting and Plenary. When a disclosure of a Conflict of Interest is made particulars of the disclosure are recorded in the minutes of the meeting concerned. Members may address their own conflict of Interest or a perceived conflict that may arise through the actions of the secretariat or members of the secretariat. If considered necessary, a discussion may take place on any Conflict of Interest. If a member is directly involved the person may be asked to be absent from the meeting whilst discussion takes place making sure to be fair to the person involved and affording right of address following any discussion from which they are absent.

Where a question arises whether or not a Conflict of Interest matter for consideration by the Secretariat conflicts with the interests of the CCPPN and following a written statement by that member the conflict may be declared by a vote of all Secretariat members excluding the member or members to whom the matter relates. Normal voting procedures apply. The conflict is then recorded, set out in writing and the parties involved given an opportunity to provide a written response leading to a determination of the matter by subsequent Secretariat vote.

A Conflict of Interest may lead to a Perceived Bias or Biased Actions or even the recognition of attaining of foreseen or unforeseen personal gain in some circumstances that goes without recognition. It is important to recognise the possibility of Conflict of Interest in all actions of the secretariat and Secretariat Members and if all Representatives and even Members of the PPN.

To ensure impartiality and protect from bias or conflict and to maintain the reputation of the CCPPN, Secretariat Members or Representatives cannot become staff within two years of resignation from the Secretariat or as Representatives. New Staff Members and Secretariat Members must complete a statement of Conflict of interest outlining at a minimum:

- any ability to influence decisions relating to the PPN in ways that could lead to personal gain.
- work for another organisation which impacts on the time you have to perform as an employee.
- any involvement in a company which is procured by the PPN
- acceptance of an inappropriate gift from a company or organisation providing services to the PPN
- any a commitment outside the PPN that involves frequent or prolonged absences from the PPN.
- any prior use of PPN assets for personal gain.
- having or exercising the ability to make decisions in favour of connected parties.
- any acceptance of payment as a supplier to the PPN.

Secretariat members may not personally gain from their role as a CCPPN member nor permit others to do so as a result of actions or negligence of Secretariat Members. The Secretariat protects the reputation of the CCPPN by acting with integrity in all matters including:

- Documenting expenses and seeking reimbursement according to strict and open procedures.
- Notifying CCPPN Secretariat and recording in the minutes any gifts or hospitality which they may be offered in their role as CCPPN members.
- Using CCPPN resources responsibly and in accordance with procedure.
- Offering all benefit that may arise by way of travel or experience to represent the Membership to an appropriate Member or Representative Member before offering to Secretariat Members or Staff.
- Prioritising the work of the Representatives and Members in active roles
- Reflecting the Work Plan and its defined Outcomes within the PPN process.
- Consulting with, informing and being led by the decisions of and aspirations of the Membership.
- Seeking meaningful consultation and incorporating consultation reasonably into the documentation and process and policies of the CCPPN.

- Procuring services meaningfully and fairly without bias or favour and setting procurement briefs that rigorously ensure the best procurement outcomes for the CCPPN.

7. Leaving Secretariat or Representative Role

Any serious breach of this Code of Conduct relating to work and activities undertaken on behalf of CCPPN may result in that person's removal from CCPPN or any of its constituent levels of Linkage Groups, Secretariat or Representative role. To leave a role a member must:

Inform the Facilitator of the Secretariat in writing, stating reasons for resigning from the Representative or Secretariat Role.

Be allowed a statement on any Conflict of Interest if requested.

Participate in an exit interview to the Secretariat if requested.

A member may be forced to leave a role for serious breach of Code of Conduct such as breaking the law or gross misrepresentation or misinformation or repeated disruption of process or interruption of others in carrying out their role or expressing themselves. In this case the member should have opportunity to present a statement issued 21 days before a Plenary, to all Members before their role or Membership is voted on by the Membership.

The Secretariat must demonstrate fair and due process to all members even following a breach of Code of Conduct by equally presenting a statement to the members on the issue at time of setting the agenda item on the issue.

8. Plenary and other Meetings of CCPPN Members

Representatives of member groups attending Plenary and other meetings internal to or external to CCPPN shall at all times conduct and behave in a respectful manner reflecting that our conduct reflects on the reputation of CCPPN

Members, Representatives and Secretariat Members shall:

- Be courteous and respectful to everyone present

- Speak by addressing the Meeting Facilitator
- Address the meeting in order and as directed by Meeting Facilitator
- Comply with the directions of the Meeting Facilitator
- Allow others to speak and make their point without undue interruption
- Follow the agenda and strive to reach effective timely decisions
- Maintain the reasonable time limits and guidelines set out for agenda items
- Keep contributions at meetings to a reasonable length of time.
- Represent the views of your member organisation.
- Be prepared for all meetings by reading relevant documents that are received in reasonable time before the meeting.
- Respect the character and communication methods of others permitting lively discussion in that it is collegiate and friendly.
- Never use issues of Conduct to unduly shut down discussion recognising different traditions and styles of communication.

The Meeting Facilitator may introduce the Codes of Conduct at the beginning of Plenary meetings (and other PPN meetings) and seek agreement from those present that they be adopted as ground rules for all for the duration of the meeting. The Meeting Facilitator should equally establish at the meeting if there is any other rules of conduct that those present wish to add to assist the running of the event.

9. Representatives - PPN Rights & Commitments

Representative Members have:

- The right to sit on Local Authority Committees and others and to carry out their role following their election.
- The right to receive correct information - agendas, minutes etc
- The right to be heard.
- The right to be consulted and included in decision making.
- The right to respect from colleagues.

- The right to participate or not in any discussion or vote
- The right to be informed about all correspondences received by CCPPN on matters specific to their role.
- The right to communicate with and speak confidentially to representative members without others present.
- The right to access and contact other Representative and members of the Secretariat and PPN.
- The right to access all correspondence and agreements and documents of operation and procedures of the PPN Representative role and of the committees on which they act other than those protected by statutory confidentiality.
- The right to expect that Staff, other members and committee colleges allow for reasonable accommodation and adjustments for those with a disability or those whose first language is not English.

10. Secretariat Members - PPN Rights & Commitments

Members of the Secretariat have:

- The right to sit on the Secretariat following their election
- The right to receive correct information - agendas, minutes etc
- The right to be heard.
- The right to be consulted and included in decision making.
- The right to respect from colleagues.
- The right to confidentiality around sensitive issues.
- The right to participate or not in any discussion or vote
- The right to be informed about all correspondences received by CCPPN on matters specific to CCPPN Secretariat
- The right to speak confidentially to secretariat members without others present.
- The right to access and contact other members of the Secretariat and PPN

- The right to access all correspondence and agreements and documents of operation and procedures of the Secretariat other than those protected by statutory confidentiality.
- The right to expect that members of the Secretariat allow for reasonable accommodation and adjustments for those with a disability or those whose first language is not English

All members have the right to make a valid claim for reimbursement for expenses incurred in the work of the Secretariat should they wish to but must equally avoid any expense that can reasonably be avoided.

11. Secretariat Members - Responsibilities

Members of the Secretariat shall:

- Embody the principles of good governance and proper procedure in all actions and live up to the trust placed on them by their election to the Secretariat.
- Comply and abide by CCPPN governance procedures and practice.
- Maintain a respectful attitude to all others and their opinions at all times.
- Participate in at least one sub-group of the Secretariat, as appropriate.
- Adhere to the standing orders and abide by the Constitution.
- Commit to attend all Secretariat meetings and, in the event of unavoidable inability to attend, shall send an apology to the Secretariat.
- Strive to be familiar with all agenda items received by them and be prepared to contribute to discussions and decision making at meetings.
- Respect the role of the Rotating Facilitator and support the directions of the rotating Facilitator.
- Respect the roles of fellow Secretariat Members and the role of Staff Members.
- Respect those members of the Secretariat with a disability or those who may have difficulty communicating.

- Keep to the agenda and stay within time allocations for various agenda items.
- Make succinct and measured contributions to Secretariat meetings.
- Participate in decision making.
- Abide by collective decisions made by the Secretariat
- Understand that decisions will ideally be made by consensus but may be by vote and consider any majority vote as a composite Secretariat decision and will accept and support it.
- Carry out any tasks agreed in a timely manner.
- Contribute your skills to the implementation of the Workplan for CCPPN.
- Support the Representatives in their role to engage with the decision making process.
- Be accountable to other members of the Secretariat and to the CCPPN membership as a whole.
- Ensure that while discussion may be lively to maintain respect for others.
- Be flexible and tolerant to the communication methods of others and never silence a voice.
- Strive to refer all decisions to the Membership and to carry out meaningful consultation.
- Maintain the responsibility of all Secretariat members for the administration duties of the Secretariat.

12. Secretariat - Responsibilities of Rotating Facilitator

In respect of this Code of Conduct, any member acting as Rotating Facilitator or Meeting Facilitator shall exercise the same rights and responsibilities as other Secretariat members and also shall:

- Ensure they are familiar with the Code of Conduct and have access to it.
- Be mindful to ensure that all members are abiding by the Code of Conduct during the meeting.
- Politely and respectfully remind members of their agreement to abide by the Code, as necessary.

- Conduct the meeting in such a manner as to support open constructive discussion and consensus building e.g. ensuring all participants are encouraged to contribute and can do so when they wish.
- Foster collaborative working within the Secretariat.
- Facilitate the resources, talent and experience of individual members to support successful outcomes.
- Be the designated person to make any public statements or pronouncements on behalf of CCPPN, where considered appropriate and/or necessary.

13. Attendance at Secretariat Meetings

Members should make every effort to attend all meetings and to that end:

- The Secretariat shall produce a schedule of meetings once per year of all Secretariat meetings.
- Where a member has missed three consecutive meetings without giving apologies or without giving reasons for non-attendance, the member will be contacted by the Co-ordinator, who will report on the matter at the next Secretariat meeting.
- If a member who misses three consecutive meetings without apologies or without issuing reasons for non-attendance and is additionally non-contactable following demonstrated attempts by more than one person and the Secretariat votes on the matter, he/she shall be deemed to have resigned.
- A Secretariat member that is deemed to have resigned will be replaced by a person from the same Electoral College/Pillar as the person who has resigned from the Secretariat.

14. Secretariat Members - Breaches of The Code of Conduct

Part of the role of the Cork City PPN Secretariat is to uphold the conditions of the Code of

Conduct Policy.

In matters relating to Code of Conduct at meetings, all matters of order are the responsibility of the rotating Facilitator. In such cases the rotating Facilitator has the right to the following courses of action:

- Decide a matter or proposal to be outside the agenda or the interest of the PPN and may equally commit to deferring to a later date or process.
- State the behaviour or conduct of a member to be in breach of the Code of Conduct. In this circumstance a member may be warned of their conduct and can be asked to leave the meeting (if demonstrating no action) either temporarily or permanently.
- Suspend or adjourn a meeting or part of a meeting and refer the particular dispute to a special meeting of the Secretariat.
- If a Secretariat member raises a concern over a breach of the Code of Conduct during a meeting, the rotating Facilitator is required to respond and address the situation.
- The members of the Secretariat assist the rotating Facilitator in deciding upon the most appropriate course of action in relation to the alleged breach of the Code of Conduct within the Code.