



Department of Rural & Community
Development

Structural Review of the Public Participation Network – Report

Final Report issued March 2022

mazars

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1. Introduction and Background

Mazars was appointed by the Department of Rural and Community Development (the DRCD) in March 2021 to provide consulting services to deliver a structural review of the Public Participation Network (PPN).

1.1 Purpose & Scope of Work

The purpose of this review was to:

1. Assess how the existing structure has facilitated the operation of the network to date against the overall objectives as outlined in the 2014 Report of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government.
2. Identify opportunities for further strengthening and enhancing PPN structures.
3. Make recommendations as to how to build on existing structural strengths and support the future development of PPNs.

In order to achieve this, the review focused on:

- Review of the structure and governance of PPNs in facilitating and supporting the role of PPNs in relation to civic engagement.
- Review the impact of the current structure in relation to strategic effectiveness and how the PPNs are achieving their stated purpose, and the relationship between PPNs and their relevant local authorities.
- Review the impact of structure on Participation, Engagement and Inclusion.
- Consider the effectiveness of the “three college” structure and the linkage groups in ensuring that a wide range of groups are engaged with at local level.
- Consider the effectiveness and impact of the administration support and development provided to PPNs at local level by DRCD, local authorities and other organisations and to assess ongoing challenges arising in the administrative support of PPNs, including the management and supervision of workers and engagement on HR considerations.
- Review the current National Advisory Group (NAG) structure and their Terms of Reference.
- Consider the suitability of the current structure of the PPNs towards inputting to climate action and community development as set out in the 2020 Programme for Government.
- Make recommendations as to how to build on existing structural strengths and support the future development of PPNs.

The review was completed in line with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016) and the *Guide to Periodic Critical Review of Non-Commercial State Bodies*¹. This forms part of a Period Critical Review (PCR), which was required as the PPNs have been in operation for over five

¹ Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, (2020) *Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies A Guide to Periodic Critical Review of Non-Commercial State Bodies*

years and was committed to under the Programme for Government 2020. The review considered the overall network of PPNs, with a more detailed review on an individual level out of scope.

1.2 Approach & Timelines

The approach to this engagement was consultative and included the following phases:



Figure 1: Approach & Timeline for engagement

These phases are described in more detail below:

- **Desk Based Review** – A detailed review of documentation and information received was completed at the outset in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the PPNs and its stakeholders. This included a high-level desk-based benchmarking exercise to consider the PPN structure and how it compares internationally.
- **Consultations** – An in-depth consultation phase was completed to ensure the views and input of a wide range of stakeholders were considered. Consultations consisted of:
 - **Stakeholder Survey** – This stakeholder survey was designed to gain insight into a number of thematic areas prior to further discussion in the focus group sessions.

The survey was issued to a broad range of stakeholders including:

- Current and past PPN staff
- Current and past members of groups registered with PPNs
- Members of PPN Secretariats
- Members of the National Advisory Group
- PPN Representatives
- Elected Councillors in local authorities
- Local authority staff
- Groups who have collaborated with the PPNs
- Bodies that host PPNs
- Those contracted to carry out development work with a PPN
- The Department of Rural and Community Development

The questions included in the comprehensive survey were directed to stakeholders based on relevance, which was determined by the DRCD, with guidance from the PPN Oversight Committee. While the response rate varied by group, the survey had 665 complete responses. More information is provided in Appendix 2.

- **Focus Groups** – Due to the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, a broad range of key stakeholders were engaged through virtual focus groups to provide them with the opportunity to contribute their valuable views, insights and opinions to the review around the thematic areas initially explored in the survey. Consultations consisted of 13 virtual focus groups with various stakeholder groups including PPN Representatives, PPN Staff, the Secretariat Network, Members of PPNs, the National Advisory Group, local authorities, decision makers on local authority committees and the DRCD Project Team. A full list of stakeholders consulted as part of the process is provided in Appendix 3.
- **Written Submission** – An online Written Submission template was developed as an additional opportunity for stakeholders to contribute views and feedback. This was offered on the basis of one per PPN location, with additional submissions received from stakeholders including the Secretariat Network, the Resource Workers Network, Irish Local Development Network (ILDN), the Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), The Wheel, County and City Management Association (CCMA), the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications and input from the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG). A total of 34 additional external submissions and inputs were received.
- **Review of PPN Structure and Governance** – Analysis was undertaken of the existing PPN structure and governance in order to determine whether they are fit for purpose in securing greater civic engagement within a participative, non-hierarchical structure.
- **Reporting & Recommendations** – A draft report was prepared and presented to the DRCD project team and the PPN Oversight Committee, followed by a final report with roadmap.

As outlined above, the consultation phase expanded throughout the review in order to accommodate the important views of a broad range of stakeholders. As a result, the detailed review was completed from May to October 2021, with an initial draft of the report presented in November, followed by a formal draft in December 2021. The report was finalised in March 2022 following engagement with the PPN Oversight Committee.

1.3 Structure of this Report

This report is structured in the following way:

- Section 1: Introduction and Background
- Section 2: Overview of the Public Participation Network
- Section 3: Analysis, Observations and Recommendations
- Section 4: Future PPN Overview
- Section 5: Next Steps and Roadmap
- Appendices

1.4 Limitations

This report has been prepared as an internal support document for the Department of Rural and Community Development and is provided in accordance with the terms and conditions agreed in May 2021. Mazars assumes no responsibility in respect of or arising out of or in connection with this report to parties other than the Officers of the Department of Rural and Community Development.

The work on which the findings and recommendations are based was undertaken in the period May to October 2021 and should be considered in that context. The review was conducted by means of independent analysis of information requested, observations, stakeholder workshops and consultation, benchmarking and data analysis. We have relied on explanations given to us without having sought to validate these with independent sources in all cases. We have however, satisfied ourselves that explanations received are consistent with other information furnished to us.

The review focused on the PPN structure as a whole and did not review individual PPNs, and as such not all findings and recommendations will apply to each PPN.

1.5 Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the staff of the Department of Rural and Community Development, the PPN Oversight Committee and the PPN stakeholders for their time and valuable input to the review.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the many stakeholders who volunteered their time to participate in the review process and for the valuable contributions that they made.

2. Overview of the Public Participation Network

2.1 Background

*Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government*² was published in 2012 and emphasised the need for innovation around citizen engagement. A Working Group on Citizen Engagement was subsequently established, and in 2014 delivered a recommendation report that set out a proposal for the establishment of the Public Participation Network (PPN). This report, and the subsequent amendment of the Local Government Reform Act 2014³, led to the establishment of PPNs and provided the legislative basis which gives effect to the Framework for Public Participation and the PPNs. The Act requires the development of a Public Participation Framework in each local authority area and the development of new structures such as strategic policy committees.

The following timeline provides a summary of the relevant events since the establishment of the PPNs:

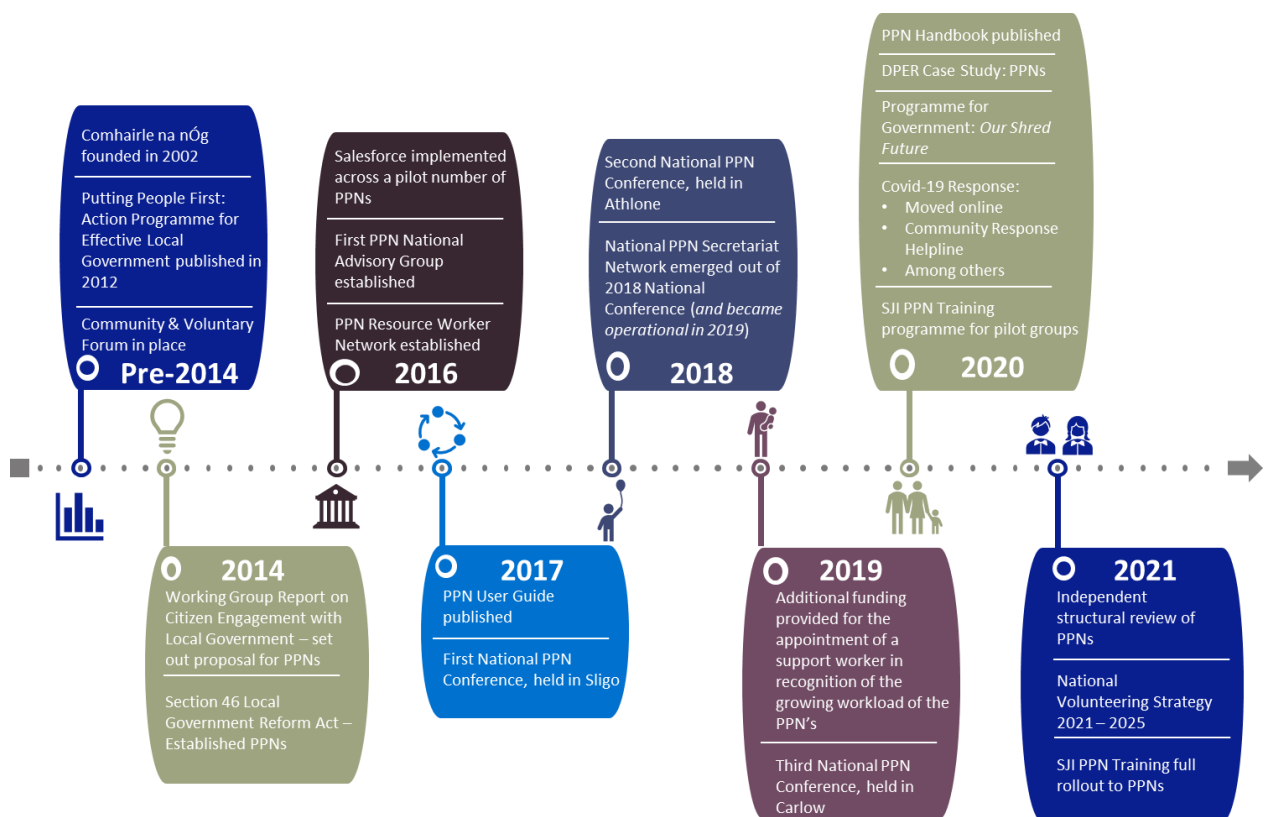


Figure 2: Timeline of relevant events

The PPNs empower and assist groups to participate in decision-making by providing a nominating structure for community and voluntary interests and a link for the local authorities around Ireland to connect, collaborate and consult with community groups.

There are a variety of Government Circulars from 2014 to 2021 setting out details in relation to how the PPNs should function including: funding, wellbeing, travel and subsistence, annual reports, income and expenditure, and the role of PPNs. Since 2014, the structure grew and developed

² Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, (2012), *Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government*

³ Local Government Reform Act 2014 (2014)

organically at a local level, and in 2017 a PPN User Guide⁴ was published to set out the operational processes of the PPNs. In 2020, a more comprehensive document, the PPN Handbook, was published and each PPN Constitution must be developed in line with each Government Circular.

The PPN supports almost 18,000 volunteer-led groups, including over 300 associate members across 31 local authority areas. Member organisations are categorised into one of three Colleges which represents their primary interest, these include:

- *Community and Voluntary* – Groups whose main interest and focus is on community response to local issues.
- *Social Inclusion* – Groups whose main focus relates to improving life and opportunities for those who come from marginalised backgrounds.
- *Environmental* – Groups whose main focus relates to environmental protection and sustainability.

The work of the PPNs covers a broad range of areas including conservation of towns and rivers, health and wellbeing, community sporting activities, climate action, green spaces and working with marginalised people in society.

In order to conduct its work, each PPN must adhere to the following six principles⁵:

- **Inclusive** of all volunteer-led groups in their area, and 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 will encourage participation by Member Groups in all of its work. There should be 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. The PPN should support new Member Groups, and Member Groups who might not have a lot of experience.
- **Independent** from the local authority and of any special interests (the PPN must account to the local authority for its budget, but is independent in its work).
- **Valuing of Diversity** and recognise that the Colleges are made up of people and Member Groups that have a wide range of different views, experiences and opinions. PPNs are expected to feed into local government decision-making with the whole range of views from its Member Groups and their Colleges.
- **Transparent** in everything that it does. It should communicate openly, regularly and clearly with all Member Groups.
- **Accountable** to its Member Groups by putting good governance policies and procedures in place.

PPNs are predominantly funded by the DRCD, with some additional funding provided by local authorities. As a result, in addition to the documents outlined above, there are a number of wider policy documents and strategies that inform the functioning of PPNs. An overview of some such strategies are included below.

In 2019 the DRCD published the *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities*⁶ strategy which builds on the Government's 2016 Framework Policy for Local and Community Development. The aim

⁴ Department of Rural and Community Development (2017), *PPN User Guide*

⁵ Department of Rural and Community Development, (2020), *Public Participation Networks Handbook*

⁶ Department of Rural and Community Development (2019), *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019 - 2024*

of this strategy is to involve communities in decision-making, support people and organisations working with communities, develop partnership and collaborative approaches to policy and programme development, as well as supporting local government to work with communities. While there are many aspects of this strategy that are applicable to the PPNs and their work, Objective 7: *Supporting commitments in Our Public Service 2020, continue to develop and strengthen Public Participation Networks as the primary mechanism for communities to engage with local government decision-making* is directly related to the PPNs. The actions outlined to achieve this Objective include:

- 7.1: Implement the recommendations of reviews conducted by the PPN Advisory Committee, as appropriate.
- 7.2: Design and implement a strategy to develop PPNs, building on learning to date.
- 7.3: Ensure adequate ring-fenced resources are provided to PPNs to:
 - Facilitate the independent delivery of their work.
 - Facilitate participation in integrated planning and decision-making.
 - Support members of the three Public Participation Network colleges to engage with local authority decision-making structures and processes.

In its oversight role, the DRCD has lead responsibility for this Objective and its expected outcome is the increased operational and represented capacity of the PPNs.

The 2020 Programme for Government⁷ emphasises its commitment to strengthening local government structures and ensuring that people have a role in shaping the economic and social development of their own area, and actively encouraging and facilitating participation. It also sets out various considerations and actions in relation to local authorities. The review of the PPN structure was committed to under the Programme for Government, *to ensure they are fit for purpose for climate action and community development*.

In late 2020, the National Volunteering Strategy 2021 – 2025⁸ was published by the DRCD. This strategy sets out the long-term vision for volunteers and volunteering in Ireland. The PPNs are listed as relevant stakeholders under three of the five Strategic Objectives, namely:

- Strategic Objective 1: *To increase participation and diversity in volunteering including embracing new trends and innovation.*
- Strategic Objective 2: *To facilitate, develop and support the Volunteering Environment so that it contributes to vibrant and sustainable communities.*
- Strategic Objective 3: *To recognise, celebrate and communicate the value and impact of volunteers and volunteering in all its forms.*

The above emphasise just some of the many areas where PPNs are highlighted as key contributors to wider sector strategies and commitments.

⁷ Government of Ireland, (2020), *Programme For Government 2020: Our Shared Future*, [online], Accessed via <https://static.rasset.ie/documents/news/2020/06/programmeforgovernment-june2020-final.pdf>

⁸ Department of Rural and Community Development (2020), *National Volunteering Strategy*, [online], Accessed via <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/3cba6-national-volunteering-strategy/>

2.2 Current Structure of PPNs

As an independent participation structure, PPNs play a vital role in enabling citizen engagement and participation in decision-making at local level.

In supporting almost 18,000 volunteer-led groups, the PPNs operate a non-hierarchical, flat structure. A flat organisation refers to a structure with few levels of hierarchy within a structure. For the PPNs, this means that no single voice controls the PPNs. The image below provides an overview of how the structure of the PPNs has been communicated to date.

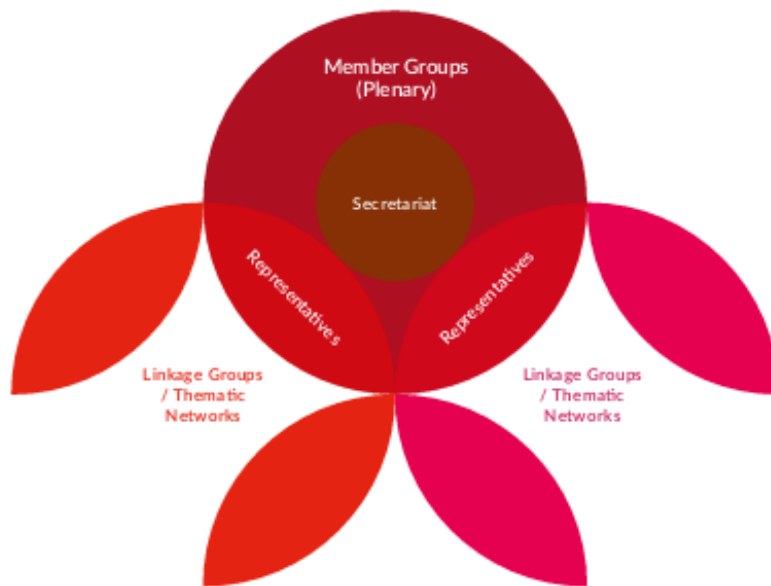


Figure 3: PPN Structure from PPN Handbook

The following diagram was prepared as part of the review to demonstrate how the broad range of stakeholders involved interact and was agreed with the DRCD as a visual representation of the current structure. The boxes reflect the range of stakeholders and the lines represent relationships.

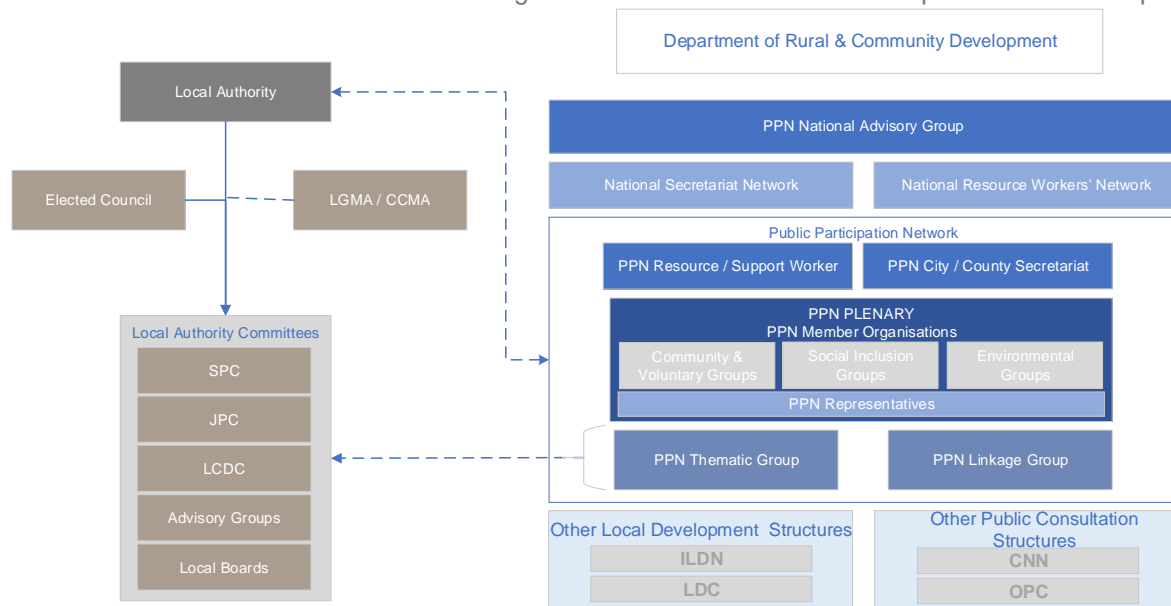


Figure 4: PPN Structure as drafted by Mazars (Note: This may be subject to slight differences by PPN)

As outlined in the diagram above, there are numerous groups, structures and stakeholders involved with the PPNs with varying roles and responsibilities, some of which differ by PPN.

A summary of the stakeholders reflected is included below:

- **The Department of Rural and Community Development** – is the main funder of the PPNs and is the Chair to the National Advisory Group. The DRCD has overall responsibility for the monitoring and development of PPNs.
- **Local authorities** – are co-funders of the PPNs and in some cases employ PPN staff. The PPNs are the primary mechanism through which the local authorities get community input at consultations. PPN members elect Representatives to local authority Boards and Committees:
 - **Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)** – is responsible for community development programmes in an area and must have at least five members elected through the PPNs colleges; two from Social Inclusion, two from Community and Voluntary; and one from Environmental.
 - **Strategic Policy Committee (SPC)** – is responsible for advising and aiding the Council in relation to the development and review of policies.
 - **Joint Policing Committee (JPC)** – is responsible for making policy proposals on policing issues in their local area.
 - **Local Government Management Agency (LGMA)** – is responsible for providing professional services to local authorities in order to support the delivery of services and policy. The LGMA is primarily funded by local authorities and was established in 2012 under the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
 - **County & City Management Association (CCMA)** – is the 'representative voice' of the local government management network through its work on policy committees and is made up of chief executives of county and city councils. The CCMA evaluates and communicates the impact of policy measures on the local authority sector. The LGMA provides support to and acts as point of contact for the CCMA.
- **PPN National Advisory Group (NAG)** – was established in 2016 and is the monitoring and evaluating body of the PPNs. Their role is to advise and support the DRCD in relation to the development of the PPNs. The NAG is chaired by the DRCD and its membership is made up of a representative from each of the three colleges, three PPN volunteers, three PPN Resource Workers and two local authority staff. The NAG meets at least four times per year.
- **The Plenary** – is a meeting of all member groups of a PPN and is the overall decision maker in relation to operation and policy issues for PPNs. It meets at least twice per year.
- **PPN Representatives** – are elected by their college to represent the PPN on local authority Boards or Committee and provide the voice on behalf of their PPN. The PPN Representatives then feedback to their PPNs on the outcomes of the meetings.
- **Secretariat** – is made up of representatives which may be from the three colleges, Municipal District or another geographical area of a local PPN and are elected and refreshed every three to five years. It is the administrative arm of the PPN who implement the decisions made at the Plenary and carry out the day to day running of the PPNs.

- **National PPN Secretariat Network (PPNSN)** – was established in 2019 with members from each of the 31 Secretariats. The PPNSN discusses best practice across the PPNs and works to strengthen the PPN as a whole across Ireland.
- **Staff** – the staff roles associated with the PPNs are summarised below:
 - **Resource Workers** – work on behalf of the Plenary to support the PPNs across a variety of functions. They can be employed either through the local authority, an external host organisation or directly by a PPN. They work independently of the local authority and their day to day work is facilitated and enabled by the Secretariat.
 - **Support Workers** – provide support to both the Resource Worker and the Secretariat in terms of organising meetings and events, promoting PPNs, encouraging membership and organising community consultations. They can be employed under the same arrangements as Resource Workers.
- **Resource Workers Network (RWN)** – was established in 2016 as a way for Resource Workers to network and share ideas and best practice. The Network meets at least four times per year and is supported by the DRCD.
- **Linkage Group** – is a group of PPN Member Groups working with PPN Representatives to progress particular issues and make policy recommendations in relation to these.
- **Thematic Group** – is a group of PPN Member Groups who work on policy themes.
- **The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage** – is responsible for the operation of the local government system and how local authorities operate. The policy framework for PPNs (and LCDCs and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs)) transferred to the DRCD in 2017.
- **PPN Host Organisations** – are community organisations that provide resources such as office space, equipment and staff to PPNs for a charge. In some cases, they may also be the employer of the PPN staff and if so, they must have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) in place.
- **PPN Support Companies Limited by Guarantee (CLG)** – are special purpose companies limited by guarantee that support and host some PPNs and provide Host Organisation services.

In addition to the PPN, the following consultation structures exist on a local level throughout the country:

- **Older People’s Councils (OPC)** – are representative groups of older people, that have been established by local authorities, with the aim of ensuring the voice of older people is central to decision making, and to develop and implement the Age Friendly City/County Strategies⁹. Representatives of OPCs participate alongside representatives of the relevant member agencies, on the Age Friendly City/County Alliances.
- **Comhairle na nÓg (CNN)** – are child and youth councils operating in each of the 31 local authority areas across Ireland, giving children and young people the opportunity to be

⁹ Active Retirement Ireland (2018), *Older People - Involved or Influential? The Contribution of Active Retirement Ireland Members to Local Decision-making Processes*.

involved and have a voice in the development of local and national services and policies, and any issues that affect them in their local area. It is the recognised national structure for participation by children and young people (aged 12-17 years) in decision making.

- **Irish Local Development Network (ILDN)** – is the representative body for the 49 Local Development Companies (LDCs) and is the largest Community Development / Anti-Poverty Network in Ireland. The ILDN supports LDCs through services such as policy development and research; HR supports; training; representation to funders and policymakers; internal and external communications; widespread networking; membership of government and civil society committees, consultative bodies; group procurement, Garda Vetting among others.
- **Local Development Companies (LDC)** – are not-for-profit, volunteer-led organisations which provide services to disadvantaged individuals and communities, such as employment supports, enterprise grants, social inclusion, training, wellbeing and environmental supports on a local basis. LDCs collaborate with PPNs to facilitate and deliver support to PPN member organisations through the delivery of programmes such as Rural Development Programme (LEADER), Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and Tús.

2.3 PPN Strengths

No one knows their communities better than the PPNs on the ground. The current PPN structure aims to provide fairness and equal voice among stakeholders. This structure provides communities with access to decision makers that would not be possible without the PPN, and therefore providing them with a voice in relation to local decision making.

Following the desk-based review and the consultations with stakeholders, an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) was completed to summarise the findings highlighted as part of the wider review and consultation process.

Some of the many strengths of the PPN, highlighted as part of the review, are summarised below:

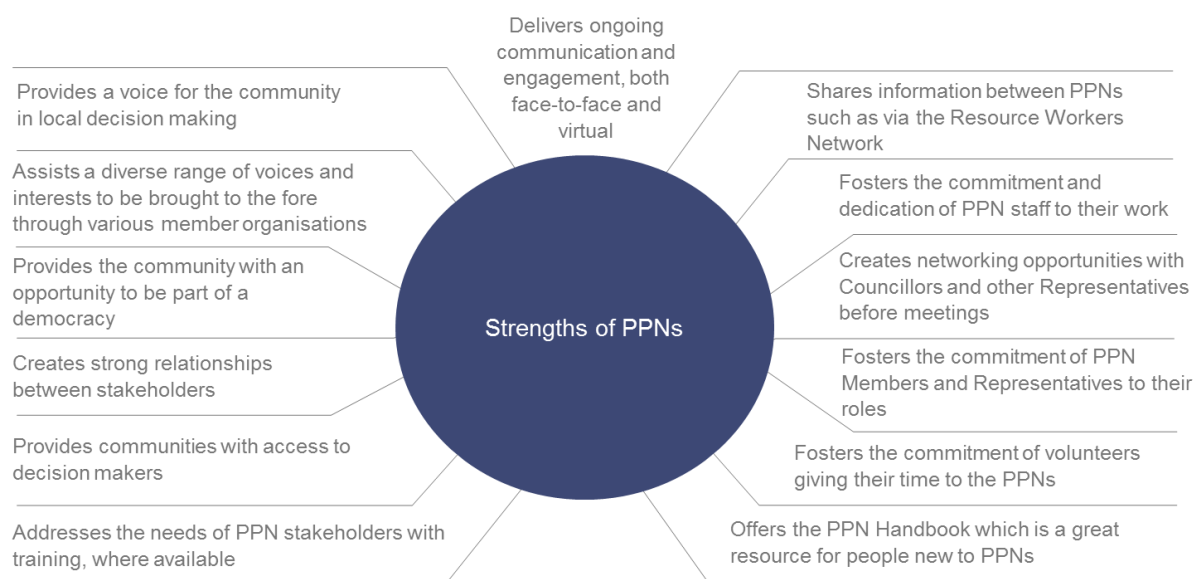


Figure 5: Strengths of PPNs

In pre-COVID times, networking opportunities for PPN Representatives and Councillors were common as they gathered before committee meetings and were able to create and develop relationships. During COVID, the PPNs played an instrumental role in supporting their communities as part of the *Community Call Initiative*. As communities begin to emerge from COVID, it is important that the strengths are reinforced, and opportunities embraced.

The recommendations outlined in the following sections seek to build on the strengths outlined above and to address some of the weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the PPNs.

3. Analysis, Observations & Recommendations

The observations and recommendations outlined in this report reflect the outcome of detailed analysis completed over the course of the review.

The following section provides a breakdown of the findings, observations and recommendations under the following headings:

- Governance & Accountability
- Communication & Engagement
- Coordination & Participation
- Training, Delivery & Supports
- Staffing & Skills

While some of the many aspects of good practice evident across the PPNs are referenced throughout the following sections, the intent of the report is to focus attention on areas requiring action and improvement, and as such does not place the same level of emphasis on positive aspects of the PPN.

The review considered the network of PPNs collectively, and a detailed review of individual PPNs was not part of the scope of the review.

The recommendations outlined below are provided as a means to address the findings and observations from the process. It is ultimately the decision of the DRCD, as part of its oversight role, to agree what recommendations are implemented.

3.1 Governance & Accountability

This section considers the overarching structure of the PPNs. It looks at the governance arrangements that exist to enable the network to function and deliver its purpose effectively.

The main findings relating to the governance arrangements and accountability are described below.

3.1.1 Finding: Slow pace of action to address issues and implement change in line with recommendations arising from previous reviews and reports

The main role of the PPN is to “*enable the PPN member groups to input into and have their voices heard within the formal decision-making structures of the local authority*¹⁰” and includes:

- To be the main engagement mechanism between the community and local authorities.
- To facilitate the growth and development of community groups through the provision of training support.
- To act as an information hub to keep the community informed on relevant local news, issues and resources.

As part of the review it was noted that not all PPNs are delivering on this purpose to the same extent. In 2020, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) published a case study on the PPNs¹¹ arising from a report commissioned on citizen engagement. Many of the issues identified in this case study also arose as part of this review, and are referenced throughout the findings outlined within this section of the Report.

¹⁰ Department of Rural and Community Development, (2020), *Public Participation Networks Handbook*

¹¹ Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2020), *Public Participation Network Case Study*

The 2020 PPN Annual Report sets out 87 recommendations, a number of which would address many of the findings outlined in the DPER case study once implemented.

The breakdown of recommendations from the 2020 PPN Annual Report are outlined below:

Recommendation	
Governance	9 recommendations, 4 of which were identified in 2019
Participation	9 recommendations, 7 of which were identified in 2019
Promotion of PPNs	5 recommendations, 3 of which were identified in 2019
Resources	10 recommendations, 6 of which were identified in 2019
Structure	5 recommendations, 3 of which were identified in 2019
Training supports identified by:	
<i>Local authorities</i>	12 recommendations, 12 of which were identified in 2019 and 1 that was also highlighted in 2018
<i>PPNs</i>	16 recommendations, 15 of which were identified in 2019 and 3 that were also highlighted in 2018
Partnership – How to enhance partnerships as identified by:	
<i>Local authorities</i>	10 recommendations, 8 of which were identified in 2019
<i>PPNs</i>	11 recommendations, 11 of which were identified in 2019

In reviewing the 87 recommendations set out, almost 80% were also identified in the 2019 Annual Report, with 5% also included in the 2018 Annual Report¹². In addition to sharing many of the same issues and recommendations outlined above as part of the recent consultation process, stakeholders expressed their frustrations at the same issues being highlighted and documented many times in the past, including:

- Delivering Deliberative Democracy (2021)
- Local Government Engaging & Empowering Local Communities Report (2020)
- PPN Secretariat Network Strategy Paper (2019)
- The Contribution of Active Retirement Ireland Members to Local Decision making (2018)
- Community Participation in South Dublin (2015)

More information can be found in Appendix 5.

The current terms of reference for the NAG allocates responsibility for monitoring progress on the development and implementation of PPNs to ensure consistency of implementation across local authority areas. In addition, it includes:

- Developing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for PPNs and local authorities.
- Analysing and discussing local progress and addressing priority issues identified.
- Making proposals on how to address issues / inconsistencies.

While responsibility for addressing issues has been allocated to the NAG as per their terms of reference, at present it is not evident that this is being delivered to the extent required. As a result, the above outlined findings and recommendations remain outstanding.

¹² Appendix 4 includes a full breakdown of recommendations from Annual Reports

3.1.1.1 Recommendation: Take a 'back to basics' approach and prioritise actions

This recommendation can be achieved through the following:

- Clarify what a PPN is and is not – Clearly set out the vision, core purpose and what the PPNs are striving to achieve. Update the PPN Handbook and any related communications to clarify:
 - What is part of the role and remit of a PPN.
 - What is not part of the role and remit of a PPN.
- Prioritise the actions that will have the greatest impact – It is not possible to do everything at once. Given the range and volume of recommendations arising, it is important that priorities are agreed and addressed.

The agreed priorities should be communicated to ensure all PPNs achieve a consistent minimum standard across the network yet still allowing for elements of local flexibility as required.

- Revise the NAG Terms of Reference to reflect what is achievable – Revisit whether all aspects of the current terms of reference can be delivered by the NAG and identify what may have impacted delivery to date. Some changes to the role which could be considered include:
 - Reallocation of more operational aspects of the current role.
 - Support in the development of indicators and tools.
 - Moving from developing and analysing to monitoring and reporting.

3.1.2 Finding: Lack of consistency in the implementation of mandatory PPN requirements and guidance

Over the course of its development, a number of supports have been generated and provided by and to PPNs. The PPN Handbook was published in 2020 and is a comprehensive document setting out requirements and guidelines for PPN operations, which replaced the 2017 PPN User Guide. The 220-page document spans a broad range of topics such as structure, membership, stakeholders and their roles as well as including sample PPN documentation in its appendices. When asked, as part of the survey, 58% of respondents indicated that they agree/strongly agree that the PPN Handbook is easily accessible and provides practical assistance to PPNs.

While the same guidance, tools and technology are in place and available to all PPNs, there are notable differences in how they are implemented resulting in inconsistencies across PPNs in processes and procedures. When asked in the survey, two thirds of respondents agree/strongly agree that the policies and procedures operated by the PPN are clear and documented. While the Handbook sets out guidance and mandatory requirements for PPNs, when explored in consultation it was found that there is still uncertainty around what is mandatory and what is guidance. As a result, not all PPNs are implementing the guidance set out in the Handbook consistently. They outlined that clarity is needed on what is mandatory and what is not mandatory for PPNs so that it can be the primary source for processes, procedures and structure of the PPN.

The PPN Handbook outlines the principles that should be adhered to, and the documentation and statements that should be in place. Of those asked, over half of survey respondents indicated that their PPN has the following documents in place; PPN Workplan (80%), Constitution (79%), Community and Wellbeing statement (58%) and Representatives Charter (58%), Strategic Plan (56%). The PPN Handbook states that the Strategic Plan, Constitution and the Workplan are compulsory indicating a gap with some PPNs and their documents.

As part of the benchmarking process, the PPN principles were benchmarked against the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (*OECD Good Practice Principles for Deliberative*

Processes for Public Decision Making and European Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in Decision-making Processes. The Principles of the PPNs matched most of those outlined by the OECD or the European Code (See Appendix 6 for the Principles Benchmarking). It was found that the principle of privacy was a gap across all benchmarks. While there is an assumption that the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is being adhered to, none of the benchmarks explicitly called out privacy as a principle nor specified details directly addressing it.

While there are structures in place to support PPNs, there are a number of areas where issues can escalate and require intervention. Some examples provided include Secretariat members resigning, which had implications for the ongoing operation of the PPN; blocking or interfering with the work of PPNs; challenging working relationships between the PPN and the local authority; and a PPN in breach of its use of funding by providing grants to member organisations.

The PPN Handbook states that “*non-compliance with mandatory requirements may have funding implications for PPNs*”. However, further information provided by the DRCD indicated that while financial sanctions, such as the withdrawal or partial withdrawal of funding, could be imposed on PPNs who fail to comply with mandatory requirements or those found in breach of circulars, there are no regulations outlining specific amounts. There was just one instance noted where such a sanction was imposed, with the preferred approach to resolving non-compliance being:

- Meet with the PPN.
- Work with the PPN to resolve the issue.
- Agree a solution to avoid withdrawing funding.

This issue has also been acknowledged as a risk within the DRCD risk register, which at the time of review stated:

- *“There is a reputational risk for the Department, as the responsible Department, associated with the operational / management issues that are being experienced in a relatively large number of PPNs. These issues are having an impact on the effectiveness of the PPN at local level in these areas, including a lack of PPN representation on critical local authority committees.”*

3.1.2.1 Recommendation: Clarify mandatory requirements and proactively address non-compliance

This recommendation can be achieved through the following:

- Clarify governance and monitoring arrangements for PPNs – ensure the ongoing monitoring, evaluation and reporting arrangements are consistently applied to ensure everyone plays their part in achieving participative democracy. This may include:
 - Clarify the mandatory nature of the evaluation checklist included in the PPN Handbook and increase its prominence. The checklist should emphasise the mandatory requirements and the frequency of review to confirm compliance.
 - Set indicators for success and monitor outcomes.
- Address areas of non-compliance across the PPNs – identify where gaps exist on a PPN by PPN basis. This may include:
 - Complete gap analysis of individual PPN’s compliance with mandatory requirements.
 - Prepare a prioritised action plan by PPN to progress work on addressing gaps identified as part of the gap analysis exercise.
 - Agree targets to track and monitor progress.

- Clarify escalation scenarios, processes and interventions – where issues arise there should be a clear response to how such situations are dealt with and resolved. For example:
 - Define sanctions for addressing issues of non-compliance.
 - Formalise the process for imposing sanctions on stakeholders who do not comply with the principles and guidelines as set out in the PPN Handbook.
 - Clarify scenarios which require DRCD intervention.
- Update the PPN Handbook and roll out good practices across PPNs – Review the PPN Handbook in line with organisational developments to ensure it remains valid, and clearly communicates governance and monitoring requirements.

Where possible, recommendations relating to PPN process should be documented and integrated with existing resources including the PPN Handbook.

In addition, where good practice is identified, this should be rolled out on a consistent basis across the network.

3.1.3 Finding: Not all PPNs are operating independently

It is a requirement, as outlined in the PPN Handbook, that PPNs maintain their independence. The Principle relating to independence states that the PPN should be:

***Independent** from the local authority and of any special interests (the PPN must account to the local authority for its budget but is independent in its work).*

Stakeholders including member groups, representatives, Secretariat members, resource workers and those contracted to carry out development work for PPNs were asked about adherence to the principles outlined in the PPN Handbook as part of the survey. Although there was a positive response overall, *Independent* was the Principle with the lowest rate of agreement among respondents. While 72% agreed/strongly agreed that their PPN abides by the principle of Independence, overall, 17% net disagreed with this statement. When analysed further it was found that disagreement was much higher amongst the following:

- Members of a group registered with a PPN (29% net disagreed from this cohort).
- Specific PPNs including; Meath (47% net disagree), Roscommon (38% net disagree), Sligo (50% net disagree) and South Dublin (38% net disagree) PPNs.

On the other hand, of the PPN staff and Secretariat members who indicated that their PPN was hosted by a company set up to host the PPN, they reported net agreement of the principle of Independence of 100%.

While the principle of independence is clearly stated, and the DRCD has developed a range of circulars which PPNs and local authorities must comply with to support adherence to this principle, not all PPNs are operating independently, with no clear consequence for non-compliance evident.

There are multiple factors contributing to the lack of independence noted as part of the review including:

- **Different understanding or interpretation of independence** – In order to maintain independence and establish clear boundaries between a PPN and its host, the PPN Handbook outlines that the Secretariat must ensure that the following agreements are in place to set out the terms of the hosting arrangement and ensure that boundaries are clear:
 - A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the local authority and the PPN in respect of the current year.
 - A Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the Hosting Organisation and the PPN.

- An SLA between the local authority and the Hosting Organisation.

As part of the survey, stakeholders were asked a number of questions relating to independence, with 18% indicating that they believe their PPN does not make decisions independently and a further 35% indicating that they don't know if the PPN makes decisions independently from the local authority. It is important to note that there was a broad range of responses across PPNs as outlined below:

- PPNs where a higher than average number believe their PPN does make decisions independently included: Kildare (82%), Galway City (79%), Clare (77%), Tipperary (66%), Wicklow (65%), Carlow (62%), Dun Laoghaire Rathdown (61%).
- PPNs where a higher than average number believe their PPN does not make decisions independently included: Louth (75%), South Dublin County (29%), Mayo (28%), Meath (28%), and Sligo (27%).
- **Lack of understanding as to who PPNs are accountable to** – Nearly a quarter (23%) of survey respondents indicated that they do not know who the PPNs are accountable to. The lack of consistent induction and mandatory training for staff, representatives, local authorities and other stakeholders results in differences in understanding, approach and expectations. This also leads to different interpretation of the information outlined in the PPN Handbook including confusion arising relating to who PPN workers are accountable to; the PPN or the host organisation. This can result in staff being involved in activities not directly related to the work of the PPN.
- **Different hosting arrangements in place for PPNs** – There are three hosting arrangements adopted by PPNs at present. At the time of reporting, numbers¹³ indicated that hosting arrangements for the 31 PPNs were as follows:
 - PPN hosted by local authority – 21 PPNs are hosted by local authorities.
 - PPN hosted by member group – five are hosted by another community organisation.
 - PPN operating separately to local authority and member group hosting arrangements – five are using PPN Support CLGs to host their PPNs and provide Host Organisation services.

In 2020/21, there were seven PPNs noted as experiencing challenges with a similar proportion (as a percentage of total) evident across each hosting arrangement. Of this seven, five are hosted by the local authorities (24% of total PPNs hosted by local authority), one is hosted by another community organisation (20% of total PPNs hosted by another community organisation) and one is operating as an independent company (20% of total PPNs operating as independent companies).

While many PPNs show evidence of good practice, of six PPNs considered to be models of good practice within the network, three are hosted by local authorities (14% of total PPNs hosted by local authority), two are hosted by another community organisation (40% of total PPNs hosted by another community organisation) and one is operating as an independent company (20% of total PPNs operating as independent companies).

¹³ Updated numbers provided by the Department on 27 September 2021, as such, they differ from numbers included in the 2020 Annual Report

3.1.3.1 Recommendation: Review structures to ensure independence is maintained

This recommendation can be achieved through the following:

- Ensure host organisations and PPNs adhere to the principle of independence – engage with PPNs and PPN host organisations to identify areas where PPNs are not independent of their host. For example;
 - Decisions relating to recruitment should rest with the PPN
 - Funding administered to the PPN should be under the control of the PPN
 - The relationship between the PPN and the Council should not interfere with PPN activities
 - There should be no uncertainty around reporting lines
- Consider introducing an annual declaration of independence – Work with the PPN and PPN host organisation to agree actions to address issues of independence.

This should clarify relationships amongst PPN stakeholders, that is to be actively accepted each year and to serve as a reminder of:

- Mandatory requirements for participation.
- Principles required to adhere to as part of a PPN.
- Further consider the role of the Secretariat and review its purpose as part of the PPN structure – the Secretariat plays a significant role with a high degree of responsibility in the operations of PPNs. As volunteers, this could be considered too onerous. As such, it is important to review the Secretariat structures in each PPN, to understand where gaps may exist in delivering on their responsibilities relating to agreements in place setting out the terms of the hosting arrangement and to ensure that boundaries are clear.

Where responsibilities are too onerous and are impacting on the functioning of the PPN, consideration should be given to assigning responsibilities elsewhere. Consider elements of the current Secretariat role that could be delivered through a central support structure.

Note: the review of the Secretariat structure should be considered in the context of the structure option chosen (see section 4.1 for structure options). The options differ in the level of central support provided, which would impact the role of the Secretariat. As a result, the Secretariat structure is not explicitly referenced in the structure options proposed.

3.1.4 Finding: Differences in culture evident across the PPNs

Schein¹⁴ describes culture as “*The pattern of basic assumptions that the group has invented, discovered or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation or internal integration, and that worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems*”.

Culture can simply be expressed as “how we do things around here”. It is the sum of everything that an organisation stands for and how it operates; its values, its beliefs, its mission, its behaviours and interactions with staff and stakeholders. Culture is complex, it is everywhere, it is subjective and ever changing. There is no such thing as a “good” culture, rather a strong culture – one which supports the achievement of objectives.

There is a very strong volunteer culture in place across the PPN network, which provides an invaluable contribution to the success of the PPNs. As outlined in the National Volunteering Strategy 2021 – 2025 *without the commitment and the engagement of volunteers in the 31 PPNs across the country, our local decision-making structures would not be influenced by the voices and input of the PPN member groups.*

¹⁴ Schein Edgar H. *Organizational Culture and Leadership* / Edgar H. Schein. 3rd ed. 2004

In order to maintain the ethos of the PPN, it is important that each PPN keeps to the six Principles established and outlined in the PPN Handbook. The survey found that the majority of respondents who were asked (over 70%) agreed or strongly agreed that their PPN abides by and adheres to these principles, as outlined below:

- *Participatory* – 86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed.
- *Valuing of Diversity* – 85% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed.
- *Inclusive* – 83% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed.
- *Transparent* – 81% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed.
- *Accountable* – 81% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed.
- *Independent* – 72% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

The current structure is very much organised by individual PPNs and heavily influenced by relationships, differing approaches and translation of values in some instances by those involved in or with the PPN. As part of the consultations, the perceived lack of respect shown to PPNs from certain structures caused both frustration and disappointment amongst stakeholders. Whilst sub-cultures are always a feature of a large structure such as the PPN, there are a number of pockets of sub-culture within the PPN that are not compatible and may not always adequately support or promote the values and culture of the PPN as a whole. In addition, this can create challenges to interpreting the culture for new staff, members or representatives.

3.1.4.1 Recommendation: Establish trust and respect that makes collective action possible

This recommendation can be achieved through the following:

- Reinforce PPN Principles and Values – The principles and values outlined for PPNs are there to enable community groups to be represented and to feed into local government decision making in a way that is fair, clear and respectful. In order to ensure these Principles underpin the actions of all stakeholders, it is important that they are:
 - Placed at the forefront of internal and external communication.
 - Called out and discussed as key messages.
 - Repeated frequently and prominently in physical spaces as well as in documentation.
- Promote Cultural Leadership: *tone from the top* – Stakeholders at all levels should be educated as to how to live the principles and values of the PPN in order to support and encourage similar behaviour. It is particularly important that any senior stakeholder across the network from leadership in the Departments to those in local authorities demonstrate these principles.

This would include the interpretation of the principles, values and culture; interpreting the principles in terms of how they should translate into practice; and ensuring all actions reconcile with the stated culture.

Where actions and behaviours go against the principles, this should be called out and addressed appropriately. For example, where a PPN is not being enabled to operate independently, any structure inhibiting this independence should be addressed. Equally, where a PPN is not delivering on its core function, this should be flagged, and action sought.

3.2 Communication & Engagement

This section focuses on the visibility of PPNs, what communication structures exist and how they enhance engagement.

The main findings relating to communication and engagement include:

3.2.1 Finding: Lack of visibility, understanding and awareness of PPNs

The level of visibility and understanding of PPNs varies across the network and relies on relationships between PPNs and various stakeholder groups. When explored as part of the wider consultation phase, feedback included that the PPNs were not well known or understood outside the community and voluntary sector as there is limited publicity for PPNs. Another reason noted was the use of jargon making PPNs less accessible. This was also called out in the Resource Workers' 2019 survey¹⁵ as being a reason why meetings were seen as not being inclusive.

The three most common ways respondents to the stakeholder survey first became aware of the PPNs include:

- Community Group (36% of respondents)
- Their job (23% of respondents)
- Their local authority (20% of respondents)

Just 7% indicated that they first became aware of the PPNs via online platforms such as social media or websites.

A key role of the PPN Secretariat Network under their terms of reference¹⁶, is to *create more public awareness and understanding about PPNs through suggesting strategies and mechanisms for making the general public and key audiences (for example politicians, community groups) more aware of the roles, functions and operations of PPNs*. This should be achieved with the support of PPN staff.

The Secretariat is responsible for coordinating the activities of the PPN and communicating regularly with all PPNs to enable the implementation of the work plan. Nearly half (49%) of PPN staff and Secretariat members who responded to the survey indicated they are involved in delivering communications, for example, newsletters to member groups. However, during the consultation phase, stakeholders spoke of the need for PPN structures to communicate more across all levels and between PPNs to address gaps that exist.

The most common platforms used by PPNs to communicate and share information as indicated by member groups, Representatives, Secretariat members, Resource Workers and those contracted to carry out development work for PPNs, who responded to the survey include:

- Online/email newsletter (75% of respondents)
- Own PPN website (53%)
- Social Media – Facebook (43%)

While information is shared from staff or Secretariat members, sharing best practice information between PPNs would encourage greater collaboration, consistency and efficiencies across the network.

¹⁵ Resource Workers (2019) Survey on *The Experience of PPN Representatives: Learnings to Inform Effective Public Participation*

¹⁶ PPN National Secretariat (2020), *Strategy Paper on Progress Made In 2019-2020, On Key Issues for PPN Secretariat Network and On Future Plans for Secretariat Network*

In terms of communication tools, the stakeholder survey found the main methods used to communicate and engage over the past year include:

- Online meeting tools, for example, Zoom, MS Teams, Skype (78%)
- Phone calls (61%)
- Email (57%)
- Social media, for example, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn (53%)
- Online survey tools, for example. Survey Monkey, Qualtrics (52%)
- Messaging apps, for example, WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook Messenger (41%)

With face to face meetings and Salesforce chatter groups used to a lesser extent.

3.2.1.1 Recommendation: Introduce a PPN wide communication structure that improves the visibility and accessibility of PPNs

This recommendation can be achieved through the following:

- Allocate responsibility for PPN wide communication and building the PPN brand – Introduce a PPN-wide communication structure to aid communication within the network and improve visibility outside the network.

This would help standardise approaches, minimise duplication and reduce the burden on volunteers who are already stretched while actively contributing to the functioning of PPNs in a variety of ways. This could be achieved by the following:

- Review, revise and relaunch the PPN brand to communicate its vision, mission and values and to enhance its image among communities. As part of this process, undertake a consultation process to assess the name, recognition, meaning and relevance of the PPN brand across a broad range of stakeholders.
 - Develop and implement a broad range of education and awareness campaigns aimed at stakeholders to enhance recognition of the PPN brand and understanding of its role.
- Address the visibility gap and communicate in a more accessible way: cut use of jargon – simplify language and terminology used in PPN communications to ensure it is easily understood and accessible to all. Communications should be written in plain English as much as possible. This should build on any work completed to date in the area of communications and utilise engagement structures that exist to elevate the position of PPNs in discussions.

This could include improving knowledge, awareness and understanding of PPNs by:

- Tailoring the message to the relevant audience.
- Sharing best practice.
- Educating communities on the role of the PPN.
- Closing the loop on communications i.e. communicating the message, seeking input from relevant stakeholders, documenting their feedback, providing them with a follow up to their feedback, and closing out or giving an update on outcomes or outstanding matters.
- Enhancing the presence of PPNs on social media platforms to share information and updates.

At the time of review, the DRCD was in the process of requesting external support to improve PPN wide communication that would deliver a PPN awareness campaign and provide

communications training. Once complete, a national communication implementation plan should be developed and rolled out across the network.

3.2.2 Finding: Confusion around roles and dilution of responsibilities

There are differences in understanding and interpretation of the roles and responsibilities of PPNs and of stakeholders operating within that structure. As part of the survey, just 37% of survey respondents indicated that their main reason for engagement with the PPNs relates to civic participation, with some member organisations joining in order to access funding or receive grants. For some PPNs, they indicated that expanding their remit beyond the core purpose of the PPN was a means to remain relevant, and for others they grew and expanded their remit organically.

When the area of roles and responsibilities was considered as part of the stakeholder survey, just 55% of survey respondents agree/strongly agree that they are clear on the roles and responsibilities of other stakeholders involved with PPNs. A higher number of respondents (74%) indicated that they are clear on their own role and responsibilities in relation to their involvement with the PPNs.

In the case of local authorities, two thirds of PPN staff who responded to the stakeholder survey indicated that there is a lack of understanding across their local authority of the role of the PPN. In addition, this was raised by the AILG in a recent paper¹⁷, which found a significant lack of awareness of PPNs in relation to the role, remit and the work that they do, especially among their Elected Members who were only elected since 2019. It was noted in the report that while training was provided to their Elected Members on the role of the PPNs between 2014 and 2016, it has not been provided since. The AILG have since committed to delivering training on the PPNs to their Elected Members.

As per the DPER case study and highlighted again as part of the consultation process, there is a perceived overlap between the role of the PPNs and others including local representatives. In addition, the role of the Community Forum, which preceded the PPN structure was referenced throughout the review. As part of the consultation process, the differences in understanding of the roles, responsibilities and remit of PPNs among stakeholders was noted. This has led to different interpretations and ultimately dilution of the core role and remit of the PPNs, with PPN resources often being allocated or involved in community related activities, which may not be directly related to the PPN remit. This can in turn impact capacity to deliver on core aspects of the PPN.

3.2.2.1 Recommendation: Simplify roles and responsibilities to provide clearer descriptions for stakeholders

This recommendation can be achieved through the following:

- Simplify PPN role descriptions and clarify stakeholder responsibilities – Language needs to be simplified around the wording of roles and greater clarity provided on stakeholder responsibilities in the PPN.
- Provide guidance and support to improve knowledge and understanding – this would support PPNs to realign activities and to successfully undertake their roles. This could include:
 - Develop a standard induction process to support new members/stakeholders joining the PPNs and to ensure they are fully equipped to deliver their roles.
 - Provide training to PPN staff to support all stakeholders to optimally perform their roles, for example, the Social Justice Ireland (SJI) training that is currently being rolled out.

¹⁷ Association of Irish Local Government, (2021), *AILG Paper on the Independent Review of the Public Participation Network (PPN) Structures*, provided on 15 November 2021

3.2.3 Finding: COVID-19 impact on interaction across the PPNs

PPNs have faced disruption to operations as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and have had to adapt their ways of working as a result. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, a range of virtual resources were used and deemed to work well: Email (81% indicated it worked well / excellent), online meeting tools, for example, Zoom, MS Teams, Skype (63%), and phone calls (47%). Even though the online meeting tools were used and deemed to work well, less than half of respondents (49%) agree/strongly agree that PPNs have the necessary technology in order to facilitate online/virtual meetings.

The impact of COVID-19 on the PPN has had both positive and negative effects. When asked, 34% of respondents such as member groups, representatives, Secretariat members, resource workers and those contracted to carry out development work for PPNs, indicated that COVID-19 had a positive impact on communication, with 34% indicating that it had a negative impact on communication. When further explored during the consultation phase, stakeholders outlined the positive aspects of the pandemic included:

- Enabled access to PPNs for a more diverse cohort of people.
- Fast tracked the move to online interaction and engagement.
- Recorded higher attendance rates at online events than in person events.
- Brought out the best in PPNs supporting vulnerable members of their local communities.

Some of the challenges faced over the past two years as a result of the pandemic included:

- Transitioning to virtual working for all or most of PPN business. While this has led to increased participation for some stakeholders, it has resulted in barriers to participation for others where access to technology is difficult or not possible (due to lack of availability of technology or lack of skills to use the technology).
- Limited networking opportunities.
- Cancellation or postponement of planned meetings and events.
- Maintaining relationships with key stakeholders in a virtual environment where face-to-face meetings and networking opportunities were not possible.
- Maintaining visibility of the PPN within local communities in a virtual environment.
- Impacted the development of relationships without face-to-face meetings.
- Exacerbated difficulties in relation to connectivity in rural or larger geographical areas – 33% indicating poor internet connection meant some members could not be involved.
- Communication challenges where regular face to face meetings were not possible and alternative ways of keeping in contact with members were developed at short notice.

The investments made by the DRCD, such as Salesforce and online training, and various PPNs at a local level by way of technology, training and supports has enabled the PPNs to continue to operate and in many instances make a real difference in the communities they serve. While this support was acknowledged, some stakeholders highlighted frustrations at the differences in the technological supports provided to PPN Representatives compared to those provided to Councillors, who they outlined were provided with laptops or tablets to enable them to stay connected.

At an overall level, stakeholders consulted and 70% of stakeholders surveyed such as member groups, representatives, Secretariat members, resource workers and those contracted to carry out development work for PPNs, indicated that a blended “hybrid” method of communication and interaction works best. The hybrid model allows for broader engagement and participation from those who may not have been able to travel to meetings, with some PPNs noting that online events had more engagement than physical events in the past.

3.2.3.1 Recommendation: Embrace opportunities for flexible models of engagement

This recommendation can be achieved through the following:

- Enhance use of technology and ensure resources are in place to enable more flexible engagement – Develop and roll out a hybrid model of engagement for PPN stakeholders that includes the timeline beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. This model could include, but is not limited to:
 - A combination of face-to-face and virtual meetings.
 - A combination of face-to-face, virtual and live streaming of events.
 - Option to join meetings in-person or virtually.
 - Recording of meetings / events and making recordings available via a secure platform.
 - Engagement across a variety of platforms such as Zoom, email and social media.

This will help satisfy those who are eager to return to in person meetings and those who may not have access to technology, while also being sensitive to those who might be cautious about returning to group meetings i.e. allowing for flexibility to suit local needs and preferences. It will ensure those who may not be able to travel to meetings, for example, those in rural areas, can still attend virtually.

This should be supported by the relevant IT resources to enable stakeholders to fulfil their roles effectively.

3.3 Coordination & Participation

This section considers the impact of the PPN structures and relationships on coordination and participation.

It considers the effectiveness of the “three college” structure and the linkage groups in ensuring that a wide range of groups are engaged with at local level.

The main findings relating to coordination and participation include:

3.3.1 Finding: Difficulties in recruitment and retention of a diverse range of members and representatives

The success of the PPN relies on the recruitment, retention, commitment and dedication of volunteers. Volunteers give their time, resources and expertise to ensure PPNs function. It can take a lot of effort to lead, grow and develop volunteer organisations.

Some of the main reasons indicated for difficulties in recruiting and retaining members and representatives include:

Expectations of volunteers – It is important to remember that many stakeholders involved with the PPNs, such as the PPN representatives, are volunteers and not paid staff. Their commitment to the PPNs is often in addition to their paid roles or commitments elsewhere. The wider consultation process highlighted issues surrounding the expectations that are placed on volunteers such as the burden of being prepped on extensive materials before meetings even at short notice, the timing of meetings during working hours, and the volume of meetings to attend. It was also noted that there is an expectation that volunteers know how to use the technology such as microphones in certain meetings, which can be quite daunting for them to get involved. These expectations and the level of commitment required can act as a real barrier for people to get involved or stick with PPNs.

The “three college” structure – The current entry criteria states that each organisation wishing to become a member of a PPN must select the college which represents its main interest. The “three college” structure includes the following, with the breakdown of member organisations by college at the time of review indicated below:

- Community & Voluntary – responding to local issues and promoting general wellbeing in their community – 13,914 member organisations.
- Social Inclusion – providing opportunities for marginalised groups in the community – 2,983 member organisations.
- Environmental – there are stricter criteria that need to be met in order to become part of this college including protection and / or environmental sustainability – 612 member organisations.

Organisations joining the PPNs must select the college that aligns to their main interests and area of work, which can act as a barrier and create confusion among some stakeholders. As outlined above, the proportion of organisations affiliated to the Community and Voluntary college, at almost 80%, is significantly higher than the other two colleges thereby creating a significant imbalance. The stakeholder survey showed that 28% of respondents felt the PPN three electoral colleges structure did not work well, with almost a third of respondents disagreeing/strongly disagreeing that it is clear and easily understood.

Of the members, representatives and Secretariat members who responded to the survey, 56% indicated that they were affiliated to the Community and Voluntary College only, while 14% indicated that they were affiliated to the Social Inclusion College only and 14% indicated they were affiliated to the Environmental College only. 4% indicated they did not know which college they were affiliated to and the remaining 12% indicated they were affiliated to more than one college. This breaks down into 5% are / were affiliated to Community & Voluntary, and Social Inclusion, 3% are / were affiliated to Community & Voluntary, and Environmental and 4% are / were affiliated to all three colleges. The college structure does not provide for groups who may sit across multiple colleges, which can be difficult in rural areas where groups work on various issues, and groups are forced to select a college when interest may rest with more than one college, resulting in some areas being underrepresented.

This has led to the Community and Voluntary college being overwhelmingly large and the strict rules for the Environmental college making it difficult to get Representatives. At the time of review, it appears the college structure was not providing an appropriate balance for groups wishing to get involved.

Lack of Diversity – 85% of survey respondents indicated that their PPN abides by the principle *Valuing of Diversity*, across a number of categories including: representative of all ages (59%), those with disabilities (57%), those who are considered to live in a disadvantaged community (54%), various nationalities (53%), those with learning difficulties (46%), Travelling Community (45%), those with ongoing health issues (42%), those who identify as being part of the LGBTI+ community (44%).

However, the lack of diversity in relation to recruitment and retention was highlighted as part of the consultation process and noted in survey analysis. This was particularly noted in relation to age. For example, 82% of respondents to the stakeholder survey indicated that they were 45 years or older, with 14% indicating they were between 35 and 44 years old, leaving less than 5% of respondents under the age of 35. As part of the consultation process, stakeholders indicated that PPNs would benefit from greater diversity.

In addition, the lack of consideration about diverse communication and access needs such as the use of braille, and alternative text readable formats of documents as Word document normal format, and/or PDF are not readable by most text readers was raised.

3.3.1.1 Recommendation: Minimise the barriers to participation experienced to achieve greater partnership in participation

This recommendation can be achieved through the following:

- Simplify the college structure – Review and identify opportunities to amend criteria to allow member groups have the opportunity to meaningfully participate and contribute more broadly and beyond a single college. This could include:

- Community & Voluntary – as all groups are community, this could be the standard entry point for all member groups. This would address the imbalance of member groups under this electoral college at present.

The same entry group for all members would:

- Support data capture and management relating to all members.
- Simplify entry and expectations for members.
- Facilitate cross-communication between groups and cross-pollination of ideas.
- Help escalate Environmental and Social Inclusion matters arising amongst all groups.
- Aid staff in sending out emails and updates – no one gets missed.

- Special interest areas – broaden the opportunity for participation, contribution and engagement in areas of significance. This would consolidate other sub-structures that already exist such as other colleges, Linkage Groups and Thematic Groups etc. and could include:

- Social Inclusion
- Environment and Climate Action
- Others as considered appropriate

- Provide targeted support and reduce over-reliance on volunteers – Provide support, clarify expectations and improve the timeliness of inputs prior to meetings and outputs following meetings. This would allow sufficient time for advance planning before meetings to facilitate informed discussion and to drive data informed decision making following the meeting. Thereby making the best use of the time and contribution of volunteers.

PPN volunteers should have an equal voice at meetings, more knowledge on how the system works, and more value placed on the voluntary nature of their roles to ensure other stakeholders are aware and understand. This should include ensuring the necessary supports are in place to reduce any unnecessary administrative burden on volunteers.

- Improve diversity across the PPNs – There are many ways in which organisations enable greater diversity and inclusion, thereby enabling and supporting differences and different abilities, needs and communication, within their communities. This could include consideration of a diversity and inclusion strategy for the PPNs.

See Appendix 7 for guidance in relation to improving diversity and inclusion.

3.3.2 Finding: Limitations in stakeholder relationships can impact the overall success of a PPN

The success of PPNs rely on strong relationships with a wide range of stakeholders. As a result, it is important that the overall structure and relationships within it are clearly defined and easily understood. The Council of Europe identifies four levels of participation, from least to most participative – Information, Consultation, Dialogue, and Partnership. In 2021 SJI published a report¹⁸

¹⁸ Social Justice Ireland (2021) *Delivering Deliberative Democracy: Participation by The Public Participation Networks in Local Government Decision-Making*

on the PPNs to capture how the various PPN stakeholders who engaged in participation processes viewed the application of the principles set out in the Council of Europe. A survey was developed as part of the review to capture the experience of PPN workers, representatives, and local authority staff who engage with Committee and Boards at local authority level. The results of the survey showed a high proportion of respondents felt PPNs moved beyond the 'Information' and 'Consultation' levels of participation, to 'Dialogue' for each stage of the decision-making process. It was noted as part of the review that some work needed to be done before 'Partnership' could be achieved at all stages of the decision-making process, as this level was indicated by the lowest proportion of respondents for each stage.

As part of the stakeholder survey, when asked about the structure, 34% of respondents disagree/strongly disagree that the PPN structure is clear and easily understood by internal stakeholders. 59% of respondents also disagree/strongly disagree that it is easily understood by the general public.

The following observations were noted in relation to a number of relationships within the current structure:

Relationship between the DRCD and the PPN – The DRCD is the main funder of PPNs and has overall responsibility for their development and oversight. When asked about reporting requirements as part of the survey, nearly two thirds (60%) of PPN Staff and Secretariat members who responded, indicated that the level and types of reporting required by the DRCD is about right.

From the consultation process there was a clear difference in understanding and expectations of the relationship between the PPNs and the DRCD. Some such differences shared as part of the process included:

- PPNs feeling micro-managed in relation to some issues, with macro issues being ignored.
- PPNs feeling unsupported to deal with contentious issues.
- PPNs being supported on a reactive basis while in crisis.
- PPNs not feeling supported in the future development of PPNs.

In relation to the DRCD's role: *A Guide to Periodic Critical Review of Non-Commercial State Bodies*¹⁹ provides guidance to assist Departments in carrying out Periodic Critical Reviews as part of their responsibilities under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. While the DRCD is delivering on its requirements in that respect, there is a difference in understanding of the role of the DRCD. The DRCD has become involved in operational aspects of PPNs in response to needs arising. This has resulted in an expectation of DRCD involvement in such issues, and frustration where this is not the case.

The DRCD has an oversight role which should be its focus, with other enabling structures providing operational support.

Relationship between PPN and the local authority – Not all PPNs have the same role in connecting local authorities with community groups around the country to inform decision-making. This can impact the ability of some PPNs to meaningfully contribute to local government decision-making that affects their communities. The relationship between the PPN and the local authority can determine when and how PPNs are engaged. As part of the survey, two thirds of PPN staff indicated that there is a lack of understanding of the role of PPNs across their local authority.

Some stakeholders were asked how well the relationship between the PPN and the local authority works:

- 38% indicated that the relationship largely works well, with a further 29% indicating that it sometimes works well.

¹⁹ Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, (2020) *Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies A Guide to Periodic Critical Review of Non-Commercial State Bodies*

- 14% indicated that it does not work well.
- 19% indicated they didn't know how well it works.

When asked about reporting requirements, three quarters of PPN staff and Secretariat members who responded to the survey, indicated that the level and types of reporting required by the local authority is about right. In addition, 72% of PPN staff who responded to the survey feel they can liaise directly with staff within the local authority at an appropriate level to facilitate the work of the PPN.

It was however highlighted that local authority decision-making structures that exist do not always facilitate meaningful input from PPNs in all instances. Some of the factors contributing to this include the process for arriving at a decision is not considered to be clearly communicated in a timely manner. It was noted that PPNs can often spend a considerable amount of time drafting contributions to consultations with no visibility or understanding of how or whether this input has informed the process. This lack of transparency regarding how decisions were reached and lack of clarity around the PPN's role in the engagement process can create frustrations amongst PPNs. As part of the stakeholder survey, a cohort of stakeholders were asked about transparency in how decisions are reached and whether true participation was sought via the PPNs. Over 50% of respondents strongly agree/agree that data and information is readily available to inform decision-making within the PPN, with a further 31% indicating that they don't know. The response varied by PPN.

Relationship between PPN and local authority Committees – The Resource Workers' 2019 survey²⁰ on *The Experience of PPN Representatives: Learnings to Inform Effective Public Participation*, found that reasons Representatives could not equally participate in meetings included:

- *Not being as experienced as Councillors.*
- *Meetings were too information based with not enough time for discussion.*
- *Being talked over by Councillors.*

As part of the consultation process, the relationship between the PPNs and SPCs and LCDCs was addressed with overall experience and perceived effectiveness differing considerably by PPN. As the Committee structures were not included as part of the review, the points noted relate to the views of the PPN stakeholders consulted only.

Where these structures were deemed effective the following elements were included:

- Timely sharing of information in advance of meetings.
- Respectful engagement with PPNs as part of meetings.
- Training provided for PPN Representatives in relation to their roles on such committees.

Relationship between DRCD and Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage –

From July 2017, the policy framework relating to PPNs transferred from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (at the time) to the DRCD. As a result, the DHLGH no longer have a direct role in relation to the PPNs.

As part of the consultation process, a perceived lack of interaction, alignment and engagement between the two Departments was noted by stakeholders. While the PPNs fall under the DRCD, the local authorities come under the DHLGH resulting in a lack of coordination between them. In addition, the DRCD are part of the NAG, while the DHLGH is not. The DHLGH is responsible for developing SPC guidelines, with no formal DRCD involvement. This results in a lack of formal alignment between the Departments in setting direction, monitoring and evaluation, thereby creating differences in how PPNs and local authority committees such as SPCs operate on the ground.

²⁰ Resource Workers (2019) Survey on *The Experience of PPN Representatives: Learnings to Inform Effective Public Participation*

Relationship between PPN and Linkage Groups – While structures such as Linkage Groups exist to bring together stakeholder organisations, a lack of understanding of this structure was evident as part of the review. From the stakeholder survey, 34% of respondents indicated that they disagree/strongly disagree that their PPN's Linkage Group structure is clear and easily understood, with a further 22% indicating they don't know if it is clear and understood. While 42% of respondents felt that Linkage Groups can serve as an effective way to get PPN member groups involved in policy development in their local area, 33% did not feel it was an effective structure for this purpose, and a further 25% of respondents did not know.

As part of the survey 43% of respondents including current members, representatives and secretariat members indicated that they are not involved in PPN Linkage Groups, Thematic Groups or represented their group at a Plenary meeting. This structure was explored further as part of the consultation process with mixed views arising from stakeholders. Some indicated that where they had Linkage Groups in place, they worked very well, while others noted difficulties in getting representatives involved citing unwieldy and unnecessary meetings, overburdening the volunteer representatives and notice of meetings being too short a timeframe to gather effective feedback. The name Linkage Group was also not seen to be reflective with some PPNs referring to them as *Special Interest Groups* instead.

3.3.2.1 Recommendation: Strengthen relationships and improve communication and engagement between PPNs and stakeholders

This recommendation can be achieved through the following:

- Remove the DRCD from operational aspects of the PPN – the DRCD should have an oversight role in the monitoring of PPNs with limited involvement in day to day issues, which should be dealt with at a local level.
- Strengthen relationships with decision makers at a regional and local level – Engage with decision makers locally to ensure they are committed to seeking community input through PPNs in a meaningful way, and acting on this input as part of their decision-making processes. This could include:
 - Provide clarification on consultation and engagement processes at a local level. The approach should be clear and transparent and manage expectations surrounding engagement processes i.e. the purpose of the engagement, how they fit in the process and how they will be informed of the outcomes. This will raise awareness and clarify the role of PPNs with local stakeholders and help manage expectations on both sides of the relationship.
 - Identify opportunities to strengthen relationships with elected officials at a local level, for example, inviting them to speak at PPN meetings or contribute to PPN topics.
 - PPN staff to work closely with PPNs to design strategies and develop capabilities to enhance the engagement of individual PPNs with stakeholders in their local areas.
 - Review Department(s) representation on various groups and committees. For example, the role of DRCD on the Comhairle na nÓg Cross-Departmental Oversight Committee.²¹
- Improve the timely flow of communication between stakeholders – agree appropriate timing for local authority committees to share information in a timely manner before engagement to allow sufficient time for advance preparation. This should also include feedback on the outcomes of all consultations in which PPNs have participated at local and national level, which should be captured and communicated back to PPN members within an agreed timeframe following the meeting in order to facilitate meaningful input.

²¹ Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, (2021), *Comhairle na nÓg: Five Year Development Plan*. Last accessed online via: <https://www.comhairlenanog.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Comhairle-na-nOg-Five-Year-Development-Plan-1.pdf>

This will facilitate a sense of accountability and respect between the PPNs and its stakeholders in working together, which in turn will help the PPNs to further progress their work.

- Introduce timeline and calendar of events across structures – This would promote transparency and provide an opportunity for meaningful engagement. Work with national decision-making structures and local organisations and bodies (such as local authorities, LCDCs, Comhairle na nÓg etc.) to develop an annual consultation plan / calendar of events at both national and local level to ensure PPNs can meaningfully input into all decisions that affect the lives of the local community in a timely manner.

3.3.3 Finding: Lack of coordination within and between structures can result in missed opportunities

As outlined further above, there are many stakeholders involved in giving citizens a greater say. At present there is a lack of coordination within the PPN network and between other participation structures.

There are named liaison officers in 26 PPNs, as appointed by the local authority, and a further three with their resource worker or member of Secretariat acting as liaison officer. Their role is to facilitate communication between the PPNs and the local authority as per the MoU. Under the current structure there is no requirement for PPNs to engage with one another. The lack of central coordination results in PPNs operating in silos, inconsistencies in approach and duplication of effort across the 31 PPNs. The silo nature of the PPN network generated discussion around the need for a PPN-wide coordination structure to aid the sharing of best practice and to breakdown these silos.

In addition, there are differences in how PPNs engage and contribute across the network. This results in inconsistencies in output and delivery as there is no joined up approach. For the most part information sharing relies on relationships between stakeholders. During consultations, it was often raised that a shared location for collaborating and sharing information would be hugely beneficial. Upon review, it was noted that Salesforce has been in place within the PPNs since 2016, when it was initially rolled out to a pilot group of PPNs and to the rest of the PPNs thereafter. The Salesforce database is the primary mechanism for the PPNs to manage their membership database and communications.

As per the sample job description in the Appendix of the PPN Handbook, it is the responsibility of the PPN support worker to ensure the information on Salesforce is up to date. It includes a file sharing library where PPNs can upload their documents for other PPNs to see, however, it was noted that at the time of review not many PPNs were actively using this feature. A members' directory has also been created for all PPNs and is plugged into their websites with live information coming from Salesforce. Other features that PPNs use include the ability to send mass text messages to contacts from the platform and some PPNs have also embedded Eventbrite into their Salesforce platform in order to track event attendance.

While other participation structures such as Older People's Councils and Comhairle na nÓg were out of scope of this review, as part of the survey, respondents were asked if they think the structure of the PPN supports the strengthening of community development in their area and if so, what groups their PPN is engaging with to achieve this. A summary of responses is included below:

- 48% of representatives and 23% of local authority staff who responded to the survey, indicated that their PPN supports the strengthening of community development in their area.
- 24% of representatives who responded indicated engagement with Comhairle na nÓg and 40% indicated engagement with Older People's Councils to strengthen community development.
- 82% of local authority staff who responded indicated they engage with Comhairle na nÓg and 71% indicated they engage with Older People's Councils to strengthen community development.

- Of the 40% of survey respondents who indicated actively working with other relevant groups to consider the practical aspects of climate action on the local area, 25% are engaging with Comhairle na nÓg in relation to this and 23% are engaging with Older People's Councils.

3.3.3.1 Recommendation: Introduce a PPN wide coordination structure

This recommendation can be achieved through the following:

- Allocate responsibility for PPN wide coordination - Introduce a central PPN-wide coordination structure to aid the sharing of best practice and breakdown the silos that currently exist. Addressing the gap and aligning the 31 PPNs under a central structure would improve collaboration through greater visibility and timely engagement amongst stakeholders.

Such a structure could provide support in areas such as:

- Sharing of best practice
- Coordinating activities
- Breaking down of silos among PPNs
- Providing a central point of contact
- Improving consistency
- Facilitating collaboration
- Aligning regional activities
- Minimising duplication across the network

In order to implement a PPN-wide structure to manage and coordinate the activities of PPNs and related participation initiatives and structures, it would be necessary to:

- Define a detailed specification for the structure including role, resourcing, structures, budget and reporting lines. The role is to coordinate all participation initiatives and structures at a national level across the PPN network.
- Communicate the role of the national structure to all stakeholders and PPNs.

In addition, and depending on the structure option selected (see Section 4.1), this could provide for shared services across the PPNs in the areas including, for example:

- HR, for example performance and recruitment
- IR, for example dispute resolution
- Communication
- Training
- ICT

While coordination is proposed to take place at regional or national level to improve consistency, share lessons learned, and provide a more coordinated approach to delivery, decisions would still be made at a local level.

- Mandate the use of Salesforce as the primary tool for data capture and engagement – while this should be taking place, it is not consistently applied, and no sanction is in place for non-compliance. In order to ensure information is captured, stored securely and available for required purposes, it is essential that all PPNs use Salesforce consistently with periodic reporting.

In order to make sure Salesforce is the primary tool used, the central team could:

- Generate automated email check-ins / reminders to update Salesforce.
- Identify “super users” to share how they do it with peers. Identify which PPNs are optimising the use of Salesforce and share information on how and why they are

using it with other PPNs. This will not only facilitate information sharing and communication between PPNs, it will also improve efficiency and data accuracy where more PPNs use the technology.

- Connect with and contribute to other Local, Regional and National Structures – Develop official networks for engaging with other groups, which can provide:
 - Opportunity to have a more cohesive voice for communities.
 - PPN participative democracy for structures in place across the sector, for example:
 - HSE setting up healthy communities – PPN voice not heard.
 - Community voice needs to be heard from PPNs, not just other structures.
 - Work collaboratively with Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and the local partnership companies on community development projects.
 - Identify and map the community organisations across the sector to find common challenges that can be tackled together.

This should include strengthening of the formal relationship between the PPNs and Comhairle na nÓg and the OPC, and any other structures considered appropriate.

3.4 Training, Delivery & Supports

This section looks at the supports available to and provided by the PPNs.

It considers the training in place and how effective it is in addressing the needs and enabling the PPNs to deliver on their purpose.

The main findings relating to training, delivery and supports include:

3.4.1 Finding: Inconsistent approach to delivery across PPNs

While a very comprehensive PPN Handbook is in place, there are no standard PPN processes, ways of working and approaches in place for all stakeholders. This has resulted in PPN or person centric ways of communication and operation. In addition, 61% of survey respondents such as member groups, representatives, Secretariat members, resource workers and those contracted to carry out development work for PPNs, indicated that they have developed new ways of working in their PPN over the past year, and 50% indicated that they communicate more often. This results in a lack of consistency in how things are done and the outcomes arising, due to differences in approach.

This can in part link back to inconsistencies in the roll out of training across the PPNs and the organic way in which PPNs have grown and developed. As part of the stakeholder survey 41% of respondents disagree/strongly disagree that they received training and support when they became involved with PPNs, yet over half of respondents (56%) agree/strongly agree that training and information events address the needs of PPN members and 49% agree/strongly agree that training and information events are targeted at the needs of different geographic locations, including at municipal district level. Upon further discussion during the consultation phase, it was outlined that where training was received, for example those who attended the SJI training, it worked well and was beneficial.

The DRCD commissioned SJI and Waterford Institute of Technology to develop the training courses after recommendations made by stakeholders in previous PPN Annual Reports. The training consists of seven 1.5 hour self-directed online sessions and 1.5 hour facilitated sessions and the cost is covered by the DRCD. The course content includes an introduction to PPNs, before moving on to talk about Local Government, Local Government Budgets, management and operational Budgets, effective participation in consultations, and monitoring and evaluating programmes and policies.

This was initially rolled out to PPNs in the south-east of Ireland as part of a pilot group in late 2020. The roll out was then extended to all other PPNs over the course of 2021²². This training is expected to be offered again in 2022 and is open to local stakeholders such as PPN staff, Secretariat members, PPN representatives, individuals involved with a PPN member group, local authority staff and elected councillors. It was suggested that this would be a good form of induction for stakeholders when they first become involved with PPNs.

Other points that were raised during the consultation phase included that training would enable people to be more comfortable being involved and enable more meaningful interaction, as well as:

- The Secretariat require training to be equipped with HR, conflict resolution, planning, and generating submission skills.
- Councillors and Council employees require training to help them see that the PPNs are a body that they should work in partnership with.
- Representatives training is needed in areas such as how to interact and use required tools and technology at certain meetings, such as the microphones in meeting rooms.
- Stakeholders training in the use of technology to enable online interaction and engagement. Only 32% of respondents to the stakeholder survey agree/strongly agree that training on the use of different types of technology was provided to their PPN / by their PPN.

3.4.1.1 Recommendation: Develop a 'PPN Way' of addressing and delivering the role of PPNs

This recommendation can be achieved through the following:

- Develop and roll out common processes that support the effective functioning of all PPNs – encouraging standardisation where appropriate, in processes such as how communication is conducted (for example via email, newsletters or WhatsApp messaging in some cases). Having standard processes in place would also reduce reliance on individuals.

This should include training with practical guidance provided on ways of working to help onboard those who are unsure of how to implement common processes in their PPN.

- Provide consistent induction and training to ensure all stakeholders have the same understanding – This could include:
 - Induction – rolling out a standardised induction programme for all new stakeholders of the PPNs as they take up their roles.
 - Training – setting a clear training programme for PPN staff (including CPD), Secretariat members, and representatives to ensure they are best enabled to fulfil their roles.
 - Upskilling - to help bridge the gap relating to the parity of esteem, for example, PPN representatives and their counterparts on other committees.
 - Introductory overview – prepare a simplified PPN overview document to help get new starters up to speed.

3.4.2 Finding: Significant duplication is occurring across the PPNs

While PPNs were not reviewed on an individual basis, a significant amount of duplication was noted as part of the review, some examples include:

- Development of tools
- Development of training materials
- Development of guidance
- Communications and information documents

²² PPN Training Brochure May to July 2021

- Capturing / recapturing of data
- Reporting

Such duplication does not make the best use of resources, which have been flagged as stretched in some areas. In addition, differences in outputs can result in inconsistencies, inaccuracies and misunderstandings.

The Salesforce system is in place across the network, where the 31 PPNs each have 10 log-in licences. This represents a significant overhead for the DRCD. As part of the review, a walkthrough of Salesforce was completed where it was noted that the following functionality exists:

- Reporting dashboards including data relating to total number of groups, breakdown of groups by pillar, number of members in groups, number of volunteers in groups, number of paid staff.
- Case management software for PPNs to log cases / queries with Salesforce Managers.
- Addition/Assignment of PPN workers to licences for each PPN.
- Online PPN Members directory plugged into each PPN website.
- Registration forms for potential member organisations and re-registration functionality.
- Mass e-mailing and SMS messaging functionality.
- Creation of meetings and recording attendance. Some PPNs have linked their Salesforce to EventBrite for tracking their consultations and attendees.

Salesforce training is completed on an individual basis when needed. This replaced the training that used to be provided to groups quarterly, which was no longer sufficient as a result of high staff turnover. In addition, a Support Hub exists that provides PPNs with access to training videos on how to use the platform as well as documentation such as a Salesforce User manual developed specifically for the PPNs. The DRCD has a contract in place to provide 600 hours of Salesforce support per year to the PPNs via a case management system. The PPNs raise a case on the system which is then actioned by one of the Salesforce Managers. The most common types of cases include:

- Change of email addresses / contact details.
- Requests for updated figures.
- Updates to directory information.
- Setting up new log ins.

The system includes a registration form on each of the PPN websites so information feeds directly into Salesforce, which can then be monitored and tracked. PPNs then log on to Salesforce and accept registrations from organisations, who then become “Organisations” on the platform when their application to register is accepted. A registration number is applied from their application form, a contact is created who receives a confirmation email of membership and the organisations are then automatically added to the mailing lists of that PPN. There are differences in the forms, and while streamlining was attempted in the past, PPNs had different requirements with some requesting additional fields to be added to their application forms.

The capture of data via Salesforce should feed directly into reporting, however as part of the review it was noted that the numbers reported through Salesforce differed to the data provided by PPNs. For example, discrepancies were noted between self-reported figures and Salesforce figures in the 2020 Annual Report. This demonstrates not all PPNs are consistently updating their information on Salesforce leading to inaccurate data. As a result, a significant amount of manual checking and follow up is required and Salesforce data cannot be relied upon. Given the investment in Salesforce and the reporting capabilities available, this is resulting in unnecessary duplication of effort.

3.4.2.1 Recommendation: Adopt a 'one and done' approach to activities

This recommendation can be achieved through the following:

- One and done approach to data capture – Data should be captured once only and utilised for multiple purposes.
- One and done approach to guidance, tools, supports – best practice should be developed, captured, shared and enhanced.

Salesforce has the functionality through its Support Hub for PPNs to upload documents to the library and share with other PPNs. Uptake and use of this feature should be encouraged.

- Focus on information sharing and learning from others: *don't reinvent the wheel!* – In order to increase information sharing between PPNs, the DRCD must first address and clarify the information sharing requirements of PPNs. It must also be ensured that the approach taken for sharing information is GDPR compliant.

A directory of who to go to and for what reason could be developed so stakeholders are clear on who to contact in any situation. This could be added to the directories PPNs already have in place on their websites that is linked to Salesforce information.

3.4.3 Finding: Limited capacity for current and new activities

Despite the growth of the PPN portfolio in recent years, the budget of PPNs has not increased to reflect its growing remit.

- 32% of respondents to the stakeholder survey disagree/strongly disagree that PPNs receive sufficient resources and support to operate effectively, with a further 45% indicating that they do not know if their PPN receives sufficient resources and support.
- 28% of survey respondents indicated that they disagree/strongly disagree that the administrative support available in their PPN is sufficient to support current operations, with a further 33% indicating that they do not know if the administrative support is sufficient.

In addition, when asked as part of the survey whether supports provided were sufficient, respondents indicated:

- 40% of respondents including PPN representatives, secretariat members and PPN staff indicated that the support provided by local authorities to enable PPNs to operate effectively are not adequate.
- 36% of respondents including PPN representatives, secretariat members and PPN staff indicated that there is not adequate support provided by the DRCD to enable PPNs to operate effectively.

Where PPNs expand their focus to include other issues of national importance, this is not completed and rolled out on a consistent basis, for example the area of climate action. As part of the stakeholder survey, 45% of respondents do not know if their PPN is engaging effectively to inform the delivery of a Climate Action Fund to support climate related initiatives at a local level, 44% do not know if their PPN brings valuable on-the-ground, local experience and expertise to national policy-making, for example, the Climate Action Plan. While some PPNs are actively informing the climate change agenda at a local level, others do not see it as part of the PPN remit at present and do not believe PPNs are adequately resourced to deliver. As such, a number of stakeholders consulted challenged the validity of being requested to contribute to climate action and whether such a request in the absence of ring-fenced resources was appropriate.

While differences and a lack of knowledge among stakeholders were noted throughout consultations around the PPNs role in relation to climate action, 40% of respondents indicated that their PPN works with other groups to consider practical aspects of climate action in the local area, these include:

- Local authorities (70%)

- Department of Environment, Climate & Communications (56%)
- Department of Rural & Community Development (54%)
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (30%)

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development²³, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. For PPNs, the focus is how community groups and organisations could embed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in their work. The 2020 Programme for Government sets an expectation that PPNs will contribute in this area, and suggests a review to ensure PPNs are fit for purpose in relation to climate action.

In addition, Objective 11 of *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities*²⁴ sets out supporting community development to engage with Climate Change adaptation and mitigation strategies. The PPNs played a role in the Climate Action Plan *bringing valuable on-the-ground, local experience and expertise into national policy-making*. While progress has been made, PPNs have different approaches to addressing this area and it is therefore not achieving the level of impact that a collective approach could potentially provide.

3.4.3.1 Recommendation: Clarify expectations of PPNs and provide necessary support to address issues of national importance

This recommendation can be achieved through the following:

- Clarify expectations of PPNs in relation to areas of national importance, for example, climate action – clarify the role of the PPNs in relation to climate action and the climate action fund. It would be important to understand the levels of support required by individual PPNs to ensure they are positioned to input into climate action and community development to deliver of required outcomes.
- Resource PPNs to input to areas that can deliver real impact and change – where areas are identified as strategic and requiring PPN input, these areas should be adequately resourced in a structured manner and in line with requirements. This could include:
 - Scope the initiative.
 - Identify resourcing requirement.
 - Allocate ring fenced budget to deliver.
 - Monitor and evaluate outcomes.
- Introduce measures to advance sustainable development and improve the support provided to PPNs – it is necessary to ensure resources are allocated where required to enable progress on such measures. This could include training to support capacity building in relation to areas such as climate change and community development where opportunity for PPNs to have greater impact exist.

This does not relate to funding alone, as without the appropriate knowledge, skills or experience it can be more difficult to spend available funds appropriately.

²³ United Nations (2015), *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, [online] via <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>, last access on: 15 November 2021

²⁴ Department of Rural and Community Development (2019), *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019 - 2024*

3.5 Staffing & Skills

This section looks at the skills and experience required by PPN staff in order to effectively deliver on the role of the PPNs.

The main findings relating to staff and skills include:

3.5.1 Finding: Challenges arising from differences in staff skills

There are two key staff positions within the PPN – resource workers and support workers. Resource workers have been appointed in all PPNs since 2016 with additional funding provided in 2019 for the appointment of a support worker²⁵. Their roles include at a high level:

- supporting the development of the PPN Strategic Plan.
- promoting the PPNs.
- supporting the PPN Secretariat, Representatives, Member Groups and the PPN.

Overall, members of groups, representatives, Secretariat members and PPN staff who responded to the stakeholder survey have a good understanding of the role and supports provided by the PPN staff and agree/strongly agree that PPN staff: *Support the development of the Strategic Plan (65%), promote the PPN (83%), support capacity building, networking and the provision of information to PPN member groups (79%), provide support to PPN Representatives on Boards and Committees (65%), provide support to the PPN Secretariat (61%) and liaise with the local authority (76%).*

As part of the implementation of the PPN Handbook, a Staff Liaison Committee is to be established in each PPN. At the time of the review, it was unclear whether these have been established and are operating effectively across each PPN. The Staff Liaison Committee is made up of members of the Secretariat and their role is to support the PPN staff in their day to day roles and activities. They are also responsible for reviewing the role descriptions of staff on an annual basis to ensure they are aligned with the annual workplan of the PPN.

Given the breadth of functions covered by PPN staff, the titles of resource worker and support worker do not necessarily convey what is involved in these roles. The skills and qualifications of PPN staff vary considerably. While the majority of staff (94%) who responded to the survey felt they had the required skills to efficiently carry out their role, further discussion as part of the consultation process highlighted this is not the view of the wider stakeholder groups. While the commitment, experience and skills of staff in some PPNs were highly praised by stakeholders, this was not consistent, and some issues highlighted as part of the consultation process include:

- Individuals being appointed to the role without the requisite community development skills, experience or relevant qualifications.
- Gaps in IT knowledge and competence.
- Staff left on their own to run the PPN with little support.
- Lack of succession planning meaning information is not passed on to new staff to aid them in their roles or reduce reliance on one individual.
- Lack of dedicated support for staff in the areas of HR, legal, conflict resolution, data protection planning, social media, PR and governance.
- Lack of targeted CPD training for staff.

While the DRCD provides funding for training to facilitate the operation of the PPNs and broader training supports, it is unclear from documentation and consultations, who is responsible for the

²⁵ Department of Public Expenditure and Report (2020), *Public Participation Network Case Study*

identification of individual staff training needs. In addition, issues noted as part of the consultations indicated that the workload currently faced by staff is preventing them from partaking in training. As individual workloads were not part of the review, it was not possible to understand the scale or identify the root cause.

3.5.1.1 Recommendation: Clarify staff requirements and address gaps in skills and competencies

This recommendation can be achieved through the following:

- Clarify the skills, qualifications and competencies required for PPN staff – the PPN role should be recruited for specifically and should specify core requirements, for example community development background, training or qualifications.
- Complete a Training Needs Analysis across the PPNs – In order to deliver the role of the PPN effectively, it is important to ensure staff have the right skills and experience for the role. As a starting point it is necessary to understand what the skills and experience requirements are in order to identify what gaps exist. This could include:
 - Identify and document the key competencies required for both resource workers and support workers as part of a PPN competency framework.
 - Complete a gap analysis of staff skills and competencies against the agreed framework.
 - Prepare a training and development plan to address the gaps that exist, as identified as part of the Training Needs Analysis, which could be documented as part of a training and development plan.
- Revise staff titles to clearly align to activities i.e. PPN Coordinator and PPN Administrator – It is important that the titles of staff are aligned to the activities they are involved in to help convey requirements of the role. This will provide greater clarity both within and outside the PPN as to the role and responsibility of PPN staff.

3.5.2 Finding: Challenges arising from differences in staff terms and conditions

According to the 2020 Annual Report, 26.9 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) resource workers and 28.05 WTE support workers are in place across the 31 PPNs. One PPN also indicated 1 WTE of development worker time and another PPN indicated 1 WTE of volunteer time in relation to their staff resources. Four PPNs additionally had staff support from external facilitators and liaison officers.

Although staff commitment and contribution was praised during the consultation process, the lack of consistency in relation to terms and conditions, role profile, qualifications and experience of PPN staff can lead to frustrations. It is understood that due to the different employment arrangements in each local PPN, this means that there are many different employers across the 31 PPNs. For some staff employed directly by the local authorities, they may have pensions or other standard public sector terms and conditions contained within their contracts whereas other PPN staff may not.

As contracts are not maintained centrally and the scope of this review did not include a review of individual PPNs, it was not possible to determine the differences in terms and conditions of staff members. Some differences in terms and conditions for PPN staff highlighted include remuneration, contracts, contract term, and working hours to name a few. These differences were flagged as having a negative impact on PPNs where it impacts their ability to function effectively. For example, it was flagged as part of the consultations that this is a factor in the turnover of staff and additionally in the issues arising within PPNs.

In 2019, DRCD launched *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities - A five year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019-2024*. This strategy reaffirms the Government's commitment to supporting the community and voluntary sector as a whole and addressing some of the burdens faced by service providers, whilst also recognising the reality of finite resources and the need to ensure that available resources are focused on providing effective services.

The DRCD has no role in setting the terms and conditions, including pay of workers, which are internal matters for the relevant host organisations. Whilst the Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities strategy commits to scoping and developing a sustainable funding model for the sector, there are no commitments in relation to the terms and conditions of such staff which remain a matter for the employer.

3.5.2.1 Recommendation: Further consider employee Terms & Conditions

This recommendation can be achieved through the following:

- PPNs to ensure that employee terms and conditions are compliant with current legislation. As a starting point it would be important to understand the differences that exist in the terms and conditions of employees. This would require a review of the staff contracts in place (i.e. the type of contracts in place and whether it is compliant with current legislation) to determine where issues may occur and require action by the Host Organisation.

It is recommended that the information gathered through the monitoring and reporting of PPN staffing levels and- retention form part of the discussions around the scoping and development of a sustainable funding model for the sector, which includes PPNs.

3.5.3 Finding: Challenges arising from staff turnover

Within the PPN structure, staff can be recruited into a support worker or a resource worker role if employed directly by the PPN. There were a range of reasons cited for high levels of staff turnover, some of which had resulted in escalation of issues that negatively impacted the PPN.

During the wider consultation phase, feedback from stakeholders indicated that PPN staff employed through the local authority tended to leave their roles with the PPN in order to progress within the local authority. While this could not be substantiated, the loss of staff and delays between new staff joining can lead to knowledge being lost. This varies considerably across the network with some PPNs experiencing greater gaps in staffing for longer periods of time than others.²⁶

While most posts that were vacated in 2021 were filled or are in the process of being filled, there were instances of long delays between the backfilling of positions. From information provided at the time of review, the following PPNs noted delays for backfills of resource workers in 2021: Carlow (six months), Limerick (vacant five months at time of report writing), Louth (3 months), Meath (vacant five months at time of report reporting). Dublin City PPN experienced a seven month delay in the backfilling of their support worker and Waterford PPN has had a support worker vacancy since July 2021. Some instances were noted of positions being filled within the same month; this was usually due to a support worker acting up into a resource worker role if a resource worker left.

At the time of review, there was no centralised support for recruitment of PPN staff across the network and instead the Secretariat, and if necessary, the resource worker is to be involved in staff recruitment. 66% of PPN staff and Secretariat members who responded to the survey indicated that the PPN Secretariat is involved in the process of recruiting PPN staff. In cases where the worker is

²⁶ Staff turnover data provided by the Department of Rural and Community Development and confirmed as accurate on 13 October 2021

employed by the local authority, the funding for their recruitment must be ring-fenced and only used for that purpose.

The PPN Handbook sets out that PPN staff should be engaged for a minimum of three years, subject to funding allocations and if the staff member is employed by the local authority, the local authority should do its best to ensure the staff member remains in the PPN position for a minimum of three years. However, if the PPN staff member wishes to avail of other opportunities within the three years, this is accepted. This can occur as there is little room for career progression within the current structure.

It was outlined that if a PPN goes for a period of time without a resource worker, the DRCD will reconcile the unspent amount against the following year's funding, which can then be used for any PPN activity. However, funding for the support worker's role is ring-fenced and this unspent funding can only be used the following year for that support worker role. The underspend is carried forward from that year's allocation of funding so that the PPN still has a full year's allocation to pay the support worker. As reconciling unspent funds is part of standard funding procedure for PPNs, this is not a sanction but is often perceived to be, especially where the reconciling of unspent funds is a consequence of a dispute. PPNs start the year with 100% of their funding allocation made up of either new funds for the year, or part new funds to bridge the gap between any funding carried forward from the previous year.

As part of the review, stakeholders indicated that staffing levels were insufficient and there was a lead time to get new staff up to speed. Over half of PPN staff surveyed (53%) indicated that they do not have the time to complete tasks, and 53% also felt there are not sufficient resources available to undertake the work of their PPN. This is also felt by the wider stakeholders with nearly one third (31%) of survey respondents disagreeing / strongly disagreeing that the PPN has enough staff to carry out day to day duties for the PPN and a further 38% indicating that they don't know if it has enough staff.

3.5.3.1 Recommendation: Provide more proactive and coordinated HR support

This recommendation can be achieved through the following:

- Allocate responsibility for HR related matters – to ensure support is provided as part of the PPN structure to support staff and stakeholders in HR related matters. Having a dedicated point of contact in relation to such matters should support the PPNs to address HR matters at an early stage at a local level, and should thereby reduce the need for escalation

This could form part of a central coordination and support structure.

- Develop and roll out a standard recruitment process – This would ensure PPN staff had the right skills and experience for the job, and would also improve the pace at which roles were advertised and filled. Some elements of the process could include job advert, job description, competency framework, role profile, probation form, performance appraisal form amongst others.

Undertake an analysis of job descriptions in the aim of providing standardised template job descriptions which would be distributed to every PPN location. These standardised templates would:

- contain 'core' job requirements for each role which must be undertaken by relevant staff.
 - include a list of "tailored" job requirements, a range of which can be selected for inclusion in the job description as required by individual PPN locations.
- Actively manage and monitor performance of PPN staff in order to identify issues that could be addressed, proactively managed and aid staff retention levels. In order to gain a further understanding of staff retention and attrition, it would be recommended to:

- Monitor and report on retention levels across all PPNs.
- Engage with recent leavers to determine reasons for their departure.
- Identify and implement a set of retention measures to address early departures of PPN staff.
- Consider opportunities to increase the job satisfaction of PPN staff. This could include the creation of personal and professional development pathways, reducing silos through cross PPN collaboration and networking, and helping workers to achieve a greater impact.

Note: the changes proposed above should be considered in the context of the structure option chosen (see section 4.1 for structure options). The options differ in the level of central support provided, which would impact recommendations outlined above.

4. Future PPN Overview

There is never a single best structure for any organisation or function within it. A structure will have inherent strengths and weaknesses, and all organisations have different capabilities and priorities. Devising the organisation structure, similar to devising an organisation's strategy will involve trade-offs, and the aim is to get the best fit to meet organisational needs.

The approach adopted in analysing the structure included an assessment of the alignment of the current structure against Mazars' organisational design principles, in order to highlight any gaps for consideration in any future structure. These principles are outlined below.

#	Organisation Structure Design Principles	
1	Strategy & Values Enablement	Enables the implementation of strategy or legislative mandate.
2	Delivery	Supports day to day delivery of responsibilities and prioritisation of work in a coherent and structured manner.
3	Logical	Groups individuals into logical cohesive divisions, functions or units.
4	Corporate or Support Spine	Ensures a clearly defined and accessible spine providing business support services.
5	Leadership, Governance & Reporting	Enables clear leadership, accountability, lines of authority, decision-making and appropriate governance structures to support strategic and operational delivery and effective reporting.
6	Resource Equity, Co-operation & Flexibility	Facilitates an equitable distribution of resources and responsibilities, promotes co-operation, resource sharing and flexibility.
7	Change	Provides the basis to align with and assist the implementation of ongoing change.
8	Balanced Enablement	Facilitates an appropriate balance between (1) empowerment of staff/managers and (2) controlled coordination at senior level.
9	Develop and Support Expertise	Support specialists and where they are scarce, allows them to focus and contribute on their expertise.
10	Span of Control	Enables effective oversight and governance through an appropriate balance of resources and responsibilities.
11	Connectivity & Collaboration	Fosters an outward looking and progressive approach to collaboration and engagement with internal and external partners in the enhancement of mandate delivery.
12	Culture	Defines the proper way to behave within the organisation. It consists of values, beliefs, mission behaviours and values espoused by staff and stakeholders.

An assessment of the alignment of the PPN structure against these organisational design principles highlighted a number of structural factors limiting the PPNs ability to deliver on its remit and purpose, which have been addressed as part of the recommendations above and structure options below.

4.1 PPN Structure Options

Following a rigorous review, consultation and analysis process, a number of structure options were explored. Having considered a wide range of options, the following were proposed for consideration by the DRCD:

- Structure Option 1: Simplify and create a National coordination structure.
- Structure Option 2: Create a National coordination, communication and support structure.
- Structure Option 3: Create a National independent structure to lead and support local PPNs.

Each of the structure options proposed address the following:

- **Introduces an element of central support**
 - Coordinating activities and information sharing across PPNs to avoid duplication of effort and ensure a one and done approach to data capture and activities conducted.
 - Sharing of best practice and common processes across PPNs for example, tools and templates, standard recruitment, induction and retention practices.
 - Providing a central point of contact for issues or queries, for example, HR related matters and data protection amongst others.
 - Coordinating the roll out of relevant PPN wide training to ensure skills are maintained.
 - Reducing the overreliance on volunteers through the provision of support.
 - Facilitating information sharing across the network.
- **Connects support structures with wider participation structures**
 - Engaging with other participation structures, at a National and local level, as part of established governance arrangements.
 - Coordinating and collaborating on activities across participation structures to achieve greater impact.
 - Addressing the visibility gap between the PPNs and external stakeholders and/or the general public.
 - Improving the timely flow of communication between stakeholders.
- **Removes DRCD from the day-to-day operational aspects of PPNs**
 - Increasing DRCD focus on monitoring compliance and evaluation of outcomes.
 - Clarifying expectations surrounding the role of the DRCD and its oversight of PPNs.
 - Clarifying when and what scenarios should be escalated to the DRCD for mediation.
- **Simplifies the college structure**
 - Providing a more inclusive structure for those wishing to get involved with PPNs.
- **Merges all sub-group structures into a “Special Interest Group” structure**
 - Facilitating the cross collaboration of member groups on areas of interest or expertise.
 - Enabling member groups and other stakeholders to engage in areas of interest and allow for cross-pollination of ideas and information.

- Ensuring resources can be used by PPNs to input into areas that deliver real impact and change across diverse interest areas.
- **Addresses the blurring of lines in relation to roles and responsibilities**
 - Clarifying roles, relationships and reporting lines between stakeholders.
 - Updating titles to more accurately reflect roles and work carried out.

As the review recommends *Further review of the Secretariat structure (see 3.1.3.1)*, the Secretariat is not explicitly referenced in the structure options included further below. The options proposed differ in the level of central support provided, which would impact the role of the Secretariat. As such, the outcome of the review of the Secretariat structure and the future structural option chosen, will inform any changes to the role of the Secretariat. Once agreed, the chosen structure should be updated to reflect any agreed change arising from subsequent analysis.

As with any project of this nature, the recommendations proposed involve changes. Many of the changes proposed will impact some stakeholders more than others and it is important for all stakeholders to remain focused on the PPN structure as a whole.

The success of each option relies on the following:

- Acceptance and willingness to change.
- Strong communication.
- Resources to address the recommendations.
- Resources for proposed central structures – each option has varying levels of cost, which must be considered in decision making.

It is important to note, a structure is not an end in itself, but a means of achieving a particular strategy or delivering specified outcomes. The structures outlined below are not mutually exclusive and one structural option can act as a means of transition to the next if required.

Structure Option 1: Simplify and create a National coordination structure

In addition to the outcomes outlined above, Option 1 maintains a relatively flat structure and specifically includes the establishment of a **Central Coordination function**.

This dedicated function will report to the **National Advisory Group** and the **DRCD** and will be responsible for:

- Coordinating activities across the PPNs.
- Acting as a key point of contact for any issues arising.
- Creating a link between the activities of the PPN and other participation structures such as Comhairle na nÓg and Older Peoples Councils among others.
- Providing guidance on dealing with matters arising.
- Coordinating requests from the PPNs i.e. PPNs can request support through a single point of contact who will liaise with the relevant people to coordinate that support.
- Maintaining the current relationship between the DRCD and the NAG at national level, and between local authorities and the PPNs at a local level.

In addition to the positive changes outlined above, the following cons associated with Option 1 should be considered:

- Represents consolidation by strengthening the current structure, but does not address some gaps identified.
- Limits ability to advance new areas or address new challenges.
- Provides limited central support at a National level.
- Gaps remain in addressing regional issues and inconsistencies.

Option 1: Simplify and create a National coordination structure

The following chart depicts the structure proposed under Option 1:

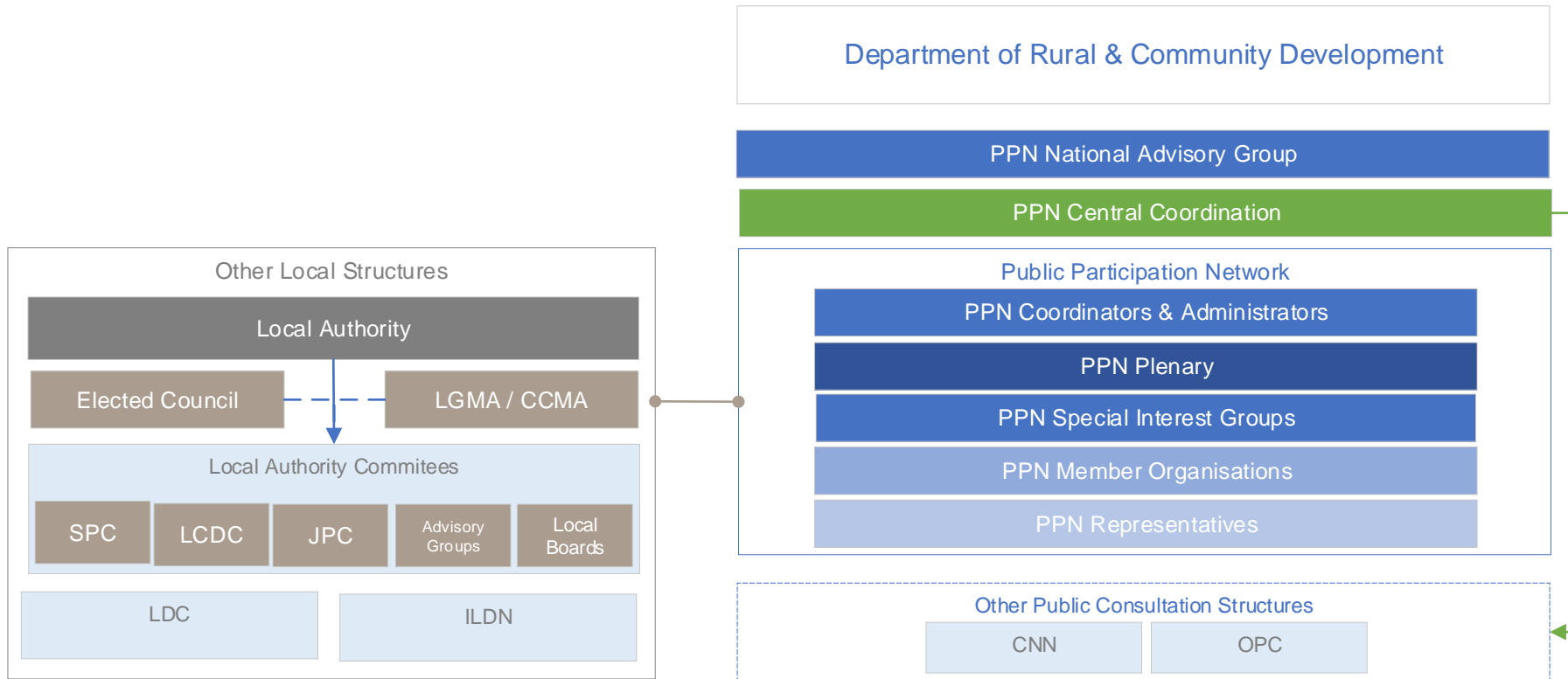


Figure 6: Structure Option 1

Structure Option 2: Create a National coordination, communication and support structure

Option 2 builds on the outcomes outlined in the introduction and specifically includes the establishment of a **National Coordination, Communication and Support structure**. This represents a National structure that would operate in parallel with the PPNs. While it would provide targeted support at a National level that addresses regional issues, it is not involved in the day-to-day operations at a local level.

This dedicated function will report to the **National Advisory Group** and will be responsible for:

- Coordination – in line with the specific functions included in Option 1 **PPN Central Coordination**. Under Option 2 this forms part of the **National Coordination, Communication & Support structure**.
- Communication - this will include the following:
 - Communicating with and between PPNs.
 - Sharing outputs, deliverables and relevant materials across the network including public consultation materials.
 - Facilitating connections between PPNs and other stakeholders.
 - Building the PPN brand and profile.
- Advice – this will include the following:
 - Providing relevant and targeted support to PPNs at a national level, when needs arise, in order to address local issues.
- Guidance - this will include the following:
 - Ensuring the operation and development of the PPNs at local level is not dependent on individuals or local structures (through the development and implementation of agreed processes, guidance, resources and monitoring arrangements – the “PPN Way” of doing things).
 - Creates a National structure where PPNs can seek assistance and guidance without a need for the DRCD to get involved in operational matters.

In addition to the positive changes outlined above, the following cons associated with Option 2 should be considered:

- Represents evolution in terms of change – all change can be difficult for those involved.
- Greater cost associated with establishing the revised structure.

Option 2: Create a National coordination, communication and support structure

The following chart depicts the structure proposed under Option 2:

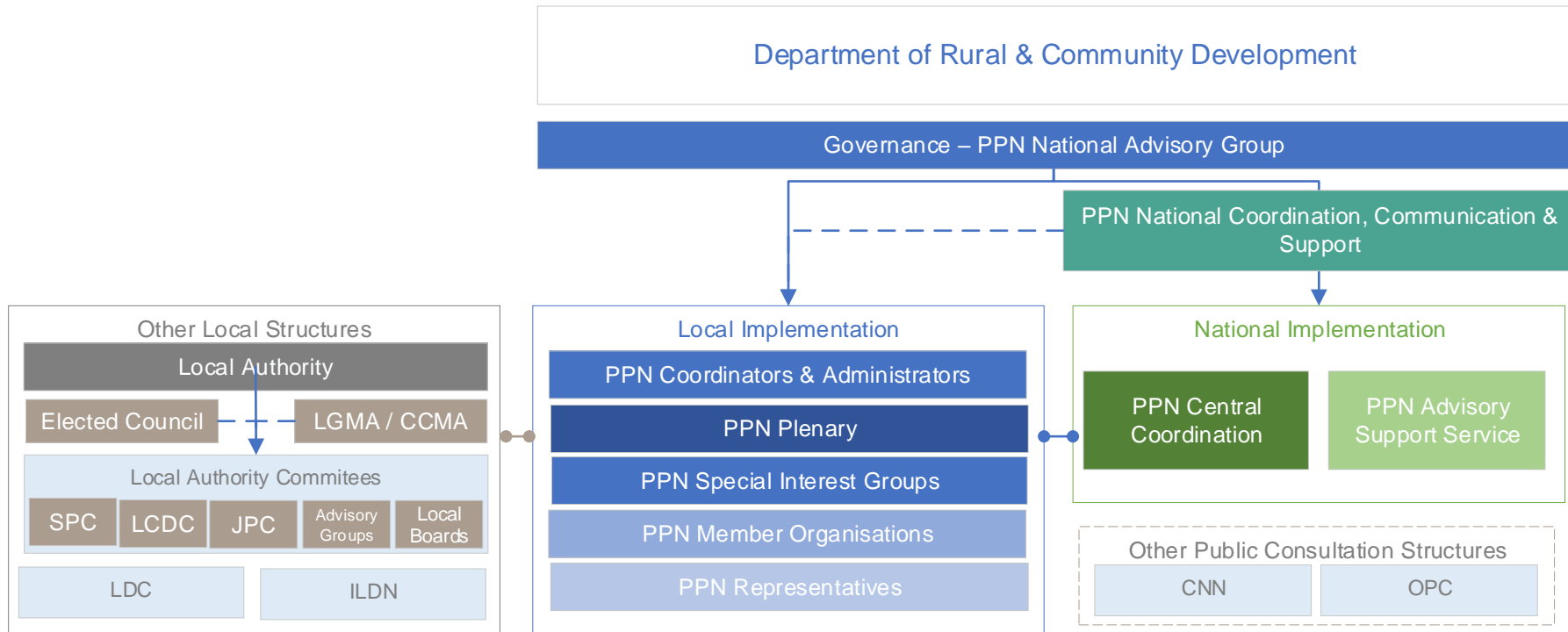


Figure 7: Structure Option 2

Structure Option 3: Create a National independent structure to lead and support local PPNs

Option 3 builds on the outcomes outlined in the introduction to this section. It introduces a more hierarchical structure that includes the formation of an independent executive structure – the **National Executive** structure, which would be established as an independent body under the aegis of the DRCD, and would replace current structures.

In addition to the National coordination, communication and support role described in Option 2, the responsibilities that sit within this structure would include the following:

- Leadership and direction
- Governance and accountability
- Performance management
- People management

In addition to the positive changes outlined above, the following cons associated with Option 3 should be considered:

- Represents evolutionary to revolutionary change – higher risk with greater level of change.
- Changes will have a more significant impact on stakeholders.
- Greater cost associated with establishing the revised structure.
- Requires more substantial investment in resourcing for proposed central executive structures.

Option 3: Create a National independent structure to lead and support local PPNs

The following chart depicts the structure proposed under Option 3:

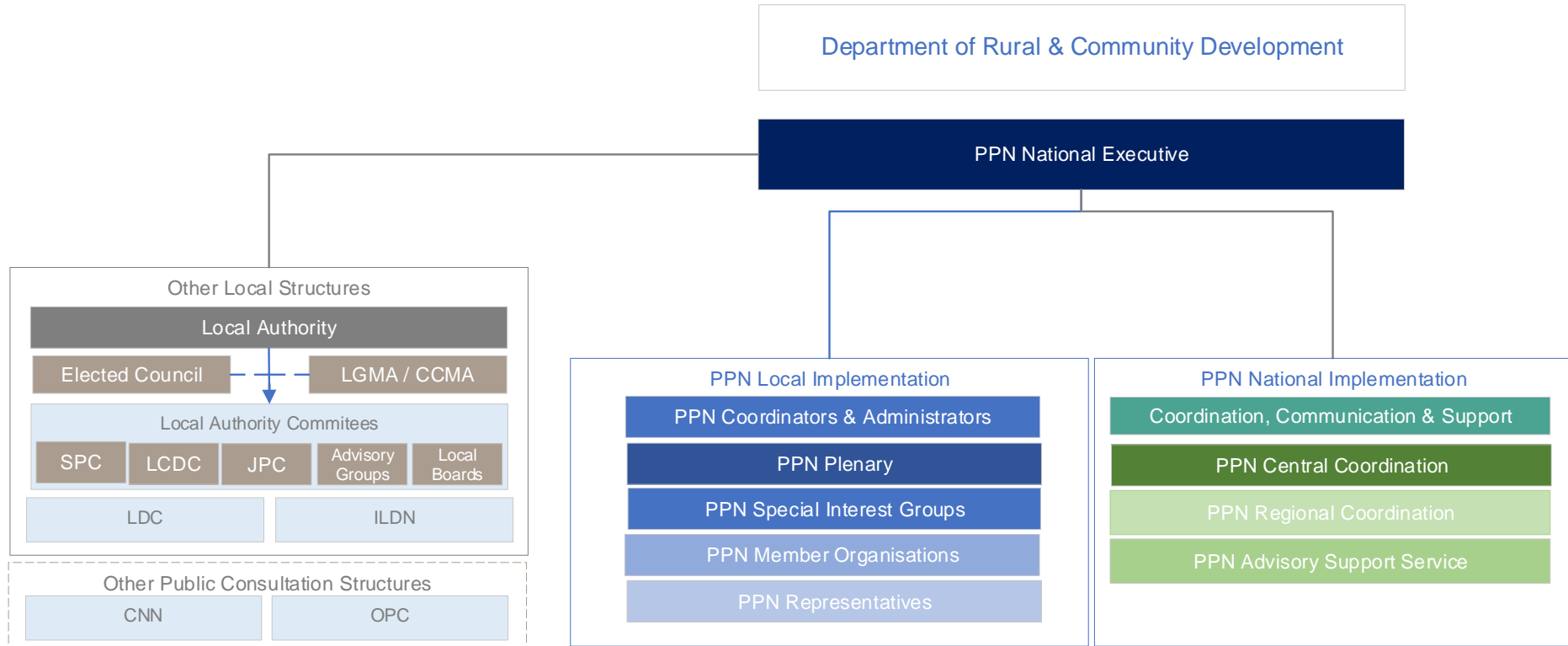


Figure 8: Structure Option 3

4.2 Recommended Structure

As can be seen from the pros and cons detailed in Section 4.1, there are a number of considerations associated with each option presented. Each of the structure options provided above caters for the future needs of the PPNs in different ways. The options pose different risks and require different levels of resourcing to implement.

While there is no perfect structure, Option 2 addresses the substantial majority of recommendations outlined throughout this report. It limits risk as it allows for incremental implementation and avoids a “big bang” approach to change while addressing the challenges faced.

It is important to note that the options are not mutually exclusive, and aspects of other models could be considered in the short term to aid the transition to a new model i.e. Option 1 could act as a first step in moving towards Option 2.

A further level of analysis would be recommended in order to consider the resource implications of the preferred option before making a final decision.

4.3 Further structural considerations

PPNs undeniably play a critical role in enabling and enhancing public participation. However, the PPN is not the only participation structure operating at a local level. While a detailed review of such structures did not form part of this review, as with all common goals, more can be achieved through working together. On that basis, it is recommended that opportunities to achieve synergies through working with other participation structures should be explored.

Further consideration of such opportunities would not replace the recommendation to move towards a revised structure, as outlined above, as this is considered necessary to ensure PPNs operate effectively and deliver desired outcomes. Instead it should form part of implementation discussions and be explored where the opportunity to achieve greater impact exists. For example, the cross-Department Oversight Committee structure, as cited in the *Comhairle na nÓg Five Year Development Plan* which includes representatives from:

- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth
- Department of Rural and Community Development
- Department of Education Department of Housing and Local Government.
- Local authorities

Further analysis would be required to determine how this could progress.

5. Next Steps & Roadmap

All of the recommendations outlined in this report will establish the foundations for the proposed change to a revised PPN structure.

5.1 Next Steps

The recommended changes to the PPN structure are not insignificant and if implemented by the DRCD, will have considerable impact on both the operations and the personnel (staff and volunteers) within the PPNs.

There are several key factors which will determine the success or otherwise of the change. A valuable approach to communicating the change is to work with five concentric circles of different stakeholders to ensure that each is involved in the change at the right time. These circles are:

1. First circle is effectively the highest level of management and will be the smallest but also the most influential circle – the *Department of Rural and Community Development*. This group will be sponsors of the change. They will be critically involved in key decisions, direction and sign off of the key aspects of the roadmap. They are ultimately responsible for its success or failure and must speak with a united voice.
2. Second circle will be the *National Advisory Group* of which the *PPN Oversight Committee* is part. They will be responsible for driving and monitoring the change across the Network as a whole.
3. Third circle will include those who are nominated to lead the implementation of aspects of proposed recommendations and internal team members managing the change – *Central Coordination Team* or equivalent.
4. Fourth circle will be the *PPN staff and Volunteers* who are responsible for day to day running of PPNs at a local level.
5. Fifth circle will be the remainder of the wider PPN stakeholders such as local authorities, host organisations among others.

Once you have the commitment of the first circle to the change, interactions between the second and third circles can begin.

Additionally, there are four components to ensuring that the stakeholders of the PPN buy into the change. These should be considered at all stages of communication. These four components include:

- **Presentation of the change** to the second circle by the first circle, displaying non-negotiable and negotiable items. This builds buy-in and commitment.
- **Active listening time** to understand what others think about it and gather their questions, doubts and suggestions. It is important that any change addresses future challenges and not only corrects difficulties of the past.
- **Issue resolution** to address the frustrations that emerged from the discussions and to determine actions that may address them. This should not involve revisiting non-negotiable items. It should address the pain points that exist, which will differ from stakeholder to stakeholder, and the gains to be delivered by implementing the change.
- **Formalising the commitment** of each member of the first and second circles through a clear roadmap for change.

In order to successfully implement any restructuring, challenges to these proposed changes must be addressed and managed.

5.2 Principles of Engagement

Successful change takes time to achieve. In order to start the journey, each PPN should uphold the Principles outlined in the PPN Constitution²⁷:

- *Working with a community development approach to address issues of all our member groups and issues of social exclusion;*
- *Maintaining open, inclusive and transparent organisational structures;*
- *Being accountable to the member groups;*
- *Acting as a vehicle to gather feedback and input into policies reflecting the diversity and range of views of member groups;*
- *Implementing and abiding by best practice governance structures;*
- *Working in a collective and supportive way with all member groups.*

In addition, the PPNs should consider the following principles:

- Demonstrate clear commitment to change and valuing the benefits that change can bring.
- Commit to the principle of adopting standard PPN-wide ways of communication and operation as distinct from person specific ones.
- Create a strong internal service culture – PPN supporting PPN, driven by the balanced prioritisation of the workload.
- Create a knowledge led culture where information is collected, used, shared and managed in a structured way.
- Work together to achieve greater impact than working alone.
- Create a fulfilling and progressive work environment where staff are trusted, supported, given responsibility and developed, where skills are harnessed and people respect and value each other as colleagues.

The approach to communicating the vision outlined above should cascade through all areas of the PPN to ensure all stakeholders are aware of, engaged in and part of the change.

5.3 Implementation Roadmap

Creating a clear, easily understood plan that sets out recommendations, sub-recommendations, accountability and timelines makes everyone part of the journey.

In order to realise the recommendations set out in this report, an implementation roadmap and tracking tool has been developed to guide and monitor the change. This implementation tracker includes functionalities to track and monitor progress to ensure actions remain on track and deliver the desired outcomes. It also sets out the sub-recommendations for each overarching recommendation, with each having an assigned lead, owner and timeline. This tool creates visual updates via dashboards on progress by theme, lead and recommendation.

Unlike the Report, the tracker is an interactive tool, built in MS Excel, which will be tracked and updated on an ongoing basis to monitor and report on progress.

Please note, the implementation roadmap and tracker dashboard has been included below for illustration purposes only. All timelines and progress will be actively tracked and monitored as part of the tool.

²⁷ Sample Constitution provided in the PPN Handbook (2020)

#	Implementation Roadmap & Tracker Dashboard Section & Accompanying Recommendations	Status				Total
		Completed	Planned	On Track	Overdue / At Risk	
3.1	Governance & Accountability	0	0	0	0	0
3.1.1.1	Take a 'back to basics' approach and prioritise actions	0	0	0	0	0
3.1.2.1	Clarify mandatory requirements and proactively address non-compliance	0	0	0	0	0
3.1.3.1	Review structures to ensure independence is maintained	0	0	0	0	0
3.1.4.1	Establish trust and respect that makes collective action possible	0	0	0	0	0
3.2	Communication & Engagement	0	0	0	0	0
3.2.1.1	Introduce a PPN wide communication structure that improves the visibility and accessibility of PPNs	0	0	0	0	0
3.2.2.1	Simplify roles and responsibilities to provide clearer descriptions for stakeholders	0	0	0	0	0
3.2.3.1	Embrace opportunities for flexible models of engagement	0	0	0	0	0
3.3	Coordination & Participation	0	0	0	0	0
3.3.1.1	Minimise the barriers to participation experienced to achieve greater partnership in participation	0	0	0	0	0
3.3.2.1	Strengthen relationships and improve communication and engagement between PPNs and stakeholders	0	0	0	0	0
3.3.3.1	Introduce a PPN wide coordination structure	0	0	0	0	0
3.4	Training, Delivery & Supports	0	0	0	0	0
3.4.1.1	Develop a 'PPN Way' of addressing and delivering the role of PPNs	0	0	0	0	0
3.4.2.1	Adopt a 'one and done' approach to activities	0	0	0	0	0
3.4.3.1	Clarify expectations of PPNs and provide necessary support to address issues of national importance	0	0	0	0	0
3.5	Staffing & Skills	0	0	0	0	0
3.5.1.1	Clarify staff requirements and address gaps in skills and competencies	0	0	0	0	0
3.5.2.1	Further consider employee Terms & Conditions	0	0	0	0	0
3.5.3.1	Provide more proactive and coordinated HR support	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	0	0	0	0	0

Table 1: Implementation Roadmap & Tracker - Sample Output Dashboard

Theme	Finding	Recommendation	Sub-Recommendation	Owner	Lead	Planned Start Date	Planned End Date	Status - DRCD Input	Tracking - Progress Update
3.1: Governance & Accountability	3.1.1: Slow pace of action to address issues and implement change in line with recommendations arising from previous reviews and reports	3.1.1.1: Take a 'back to basics' approach and prioritise actions	Clarify what a PPN is and is not	Select Owner	Select Lead	Insert Date	Insert Date	Status	TBC
			Prioritise the actions that will have the greatest impact	Select Owner	Select Lead	Insert Date	Insert Date	Status	TBC
			Revise the NAG Terms of Reference to reflect what is achievable	Select Owner	Select Lead	Insert Date	Insert Date	Status	TBC

Table 2: Implementation Roadmap & Tracker Tool – Sample Input Sheet

In order for the recommendations of this review to be realised, the commitment of all PPN stakeholders and relevant DRCD staff will be necessary, and significant collaboration and engagement will be required across the PPN. The Implementation Roadmap & Tracker will be finalised by the DRCD in early 2022.

6. Appendices

A1 – Glossary of Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
AILG	Association of Irish Local Government
CCMA	County and City Management Association
CLG	Companies Limited by Guarantee
CNN	Comhairle na nÓg
DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure & Reform
DRCD	Department of Rural and Community Development
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
ILDN	Irish Local Development Network
JPC	Joint Policing Committee
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LCDC	Local Community Development Committee
LDC	Local Development Companies
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plan
LGMA	Local Government Management Agency
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAG	(PPN) National Advisory Group
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPC	Older People's Councils
PCR	Periodic Critical Review
PPN	Public Participation Network
PPNSN	PPN Secretariat Network
RWN	Resource Workers' Network
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
SJI	Social Justice Ireland
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SPC	Strategic Policy Committees
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
WTE	Whole Time Equivalent

A2 – Survey Summary

As part of the structural review of the PPNs, a stakeholder survey was designed and distributed online to a wide range of stakeholder groups in June 2021. This survey was developed by Mazars to inform the consultation sessions and it was designed to gain insight into a number of thematic areas prior to further discussion in the focus group sessions. The survey presented a range of questions relevant to the following thematic areas:

- **Governance and Structure** – *this theme relates to the structures, governance and relationships that exist to enable the appropriate functioning of the PPNs.*
- **Resources and Skills** – *this theme relates to the resources, skills and supports that exist for PPN staff and other stakeholders, to deliver their roles effectively in relation to the PPNs.*
- **Participation, Engagement and Inclusion** – *this theme relates to the general awareness, communication and engagement methods of the PPNs and their suitability post COVID-19.*
- **Climate Action** – *this theme relates to the work of the PPNs in relation to Climate Action at local level.*
- **Community Development** - *this theme relates to how the PPN structure supports community development and addresses issues of national importance at local level.*

The survey was issued to a range of stakeholder groups as set out below. There were 665 complete responses.

The breakdown of complete responses (n=665) across the relevant stakeholder groups is set out below.

- Current and past PPN staff (5% of respondents)
- Current members of groups registered with a PPN (45%)
- Past members of groups registered with a PPN (4%)
- Members of the PPN Secretariat (13%)
- Members of the PPN National Advisory Group (1%)
- PPN Representatives on local boards or committees such as Local Community Development Committees, Joint Policing Committee, and Strategic Policy Committee (11%)
- Elected Councillors on a local authority (2%)
- Local authority staff (7%)
- Groups that have collaborated with PPNs (for example, Partnership companies, Volunteer Centres etc) (8%)
- Those contracted to carry out development work with a PPN (1%)
- Non-local authority bodies that host a PPN (2%)
- Department of Rural and Community Development team members (2%)

The survey outputs provided valuable insights and were used as key inputs to the consultation process, allowing Mazars to probe the relevant areas in more detail as part of discussions.

We are grateful to all stakeholders who have taken the time to contribute their views via the survey and through their participation in the focus groups.

A3 – Stakeholders Consulted

A summary of the stakeholders consulted as part of this process is set out in the table below:

Stakeholder Group	Type of Engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PPN Oversight Committee 	2 x Working Sessions
<p>Various stakeholders including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current and past PPN staff Current members of groups registered with a PPN Past members of groups registered with a PPN Members of the PPN Secretariat Members of the PPN National Advisory Group PPN Representatives on local boards or committees such as Local Community Development Committees, Joint Policing Committee, and Strategic Policy Committee Elected Councillors on a local authority Local authority staff Groups that have collaborated with PPNs (for example, Partnership companies, Volunteer Centres etc) Those contracted to carry out development work with a PPN Non- local authority bodies that host a PPN Department of Rural and Community Development team members 	1 x Stakeholder Survey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PPN Representatives 	2 x Virtual Focus Groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PPN Staff 	2 x Virtual Focus Groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PPN National Secretariat Network 	1 x Virtual Focus Group 1 x Written Submission
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members of PPNs 	4 x Virtual Focus Groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Advisory Group 	1 x Virtual Focus Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local authority staff 	1 x Virtual Focus Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision makers on local authority committees 	1 x Virtual Focus Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DRCD Project Team 	1 x Virtual Focus Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PPNs 	26 x Written Submissions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Justice Ireland 	1 x Written Submission
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Council for People with Disabilities 	1 x Written Submission
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Wheel 	1 x Written Submission
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Housing Local Government & Heritage 	1 x Written Submission
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> County & City Management Agency (CCMA) 	1 x Written Submission
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anonymous 	1 x Written Submission
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) 	1 x Input document

A4 – 2020 Annual Report Recommendations

The below table sets out the recommendations made by local authorities and PPNs for the PPNs as per the 2020 Annual Report. Where recommendations were also specified in the 2019 and 2018 Annual Reports, this is indicated in the relevant column.

Recommendation	2020	2019	2018
Governance – the management and oversight of PPNs			
Ensure current governance structures are in place and operating effectively	✓		
Ensure a MOU is in place and fit for purpose	✓		
Consider introducing key performance indicators (KPIs)	✓		
Where applicable, develop and use the Vision for Community Well-being	✓		
Building awareness of Sustainable Development Goals and linking them to all county & PPN plans	✓		
Development and standardisation of policies for the operation of the PPNs	✓	✓	
Provision of detailed guidance on the respective roles involved in the PPNs	✓	✓	
Develop a strategic vision for PPNs	✓	✓	
Clarify the ratifications process of the Environmental Pillar	✓	✓	
Participation – engagements attended to and conducted by PPNs			
Build on relationships and links forged during 2020	✓		
Increased role of PPN in the climate change action agenda	✓		
Enhance the collaboration between the PPN and the local authority through training and capacity building	✓	✓	
Ensure local authorities adhere to the requirement that PPNs act as the main route for community consultation and representation	✓	✓	
Senior local authority staff to engage with PPNs	✓	✓	
Develop and implement more effective communications structures for Representatives and their Boards / Committees, to include updates on community development initiatives	✓	✓	
Adopt the basic principles of engagement for local decision-making	✓	✓	
Explore the development of thematic linkage groups	✓	✓	
Develop a local authority handbook, such as that provided by the IPA, to provide a detailed breakdown of each department within the local authority	✓	✓	
Promotion of PPNs / Communications – in order to engage new and existing member groups and stakeholders			
Continued promotion of the PPN to the local community as well as nationally by inclusion in programmes by stakeholders/partners to ensure we reach as many organisations as possible, under each pillar	✓		
Simplify the language used	✓		

Recommendation	2020	2019	2018
Development of a national promotional and information campaign for PPNs	✓	✓	
Greater national recognition of PPNs across all relevant Government Departments	✓	✓	
Develop a methodology pack for local authority staff on public engagement	✓	✓	
Resources – including staff, funding necessary for PPNs			
Review the reasons for staff turnover	✓		
COVID-19 highlighted the need for adequate and where needed, additional resources.	✓		
Maximise and build on the advances in digital communications	✓		
Increased supports to newly formed groups	✓		
Increased budget for PPNs at local and national level.	✓	✓	
Ensure sustainability of funding for PPNs.	✓	✓	
Ensure Support Workers are permanent staff.	✓	✓	
Implementation of a National Resource Worker to support the PPNs at national level.	✓	✓	
Review grading structure of PPN staff.	✓	✓	
Ensure security of funding.	✓	✓	
Structure – the way in which the PPNs operate and interact with stakeholders			
Review the structure of the PPNs	✓		
Develop a National Structure – Public Participation Ireland	✓		
Simplify the structure of the PPNs.	✓	✓	
Enable the establishment of the role of Chairperson of the Secretariat, rotating annually.	✓	✓	
Make the PPNs part of the statutory development plan for the Local Area Plans and Co-Development Plans.	✓	✓	
Training			
<i>Training supports identified by local authorities</i>			
Refresher training on the role and function of the PPN, and how it is of benefit to the local authority.	✓	✓	
Community Development training and briefing sessions.	✓	✓	
Induction training for local authority staff and elected members, procured at a national level for consistency.	✓	✓	
Training on the development and uses of the Vision for Community Wellbeing.	✓	✓	
Information session on the Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities Strategy.	✓	✓	
Training on guidelines for consultations by local authorities.	✓	✓	
Public engagement and the role of the PPN.	✓	✓	

Recommendation	2020	2019	2018
IT Skills.	✓	✓	
Effective engagement of marginalised groups.	✓	✓	
Human Rights and Equality / Public Sector Duty.	✓	✓	
The Sustainable Development Goals.	✓	✓	
Communications training.	✓	✓	✓
<i>Training supports identified by PPNs</i>			
Salesforce.	✓	✓	
Advocacy and Influencing Policy.	✓	✓	
Local authority structures.	✓	✓	
Public Speaking and Communications.	✓	✓	
Governance.	✓	✓	
Data Protection.	✓	✓	✓
Induction for Secretariat Members and Representatives on their respective roles.	✓	✓	
Policy Development and Decision-making.	✓	✓	
Human Rights and Equality / Public Sector Duty.	✓	✓	
The Sustainable Development Goals.	✓	✓	
Strategic Planning.	✓	✓	✓
How to write submissions.	✓	✓	
Charities Regulation.	✓	✓	
Social Media.	✓	✓	✓
IT Skills.	✓	✓	
Holding effective meetings/facilitation	✓		
Partnership			
<i>How to enhance partnerships as identified by the Local Authorities</i>			
Increased communications	✓		
Other Departments should be made aware of the PPNs and their role	✓		
Greater awareness raising of the PPN and its functions and objectives	✓	✓	
Induction for Representatives on local authority boards and committees	✓	✓	
More lead-in time for initiatives, meetings, consultations and other collaborations between local authorities and PPNs	✓	✓	
Collaborative planning with all stakeholders	✓	✓	
Regular updates from the local authority	✓	✓	
Local authorities to provide information on the roles and functions of local authority boards and committees	✓	✓	

Recommendation	2020	2019	2018
PPN to be referenced as a form of participation in the local authority Guidelines	✓	✓	
Increased knowledge of the importance of the PPN contribution to policy making, drawing on existing Government materials	✓	✓	
<i>How to enhance partnerships as identified by the PPNs</i>			
Link with other statutory partners through their parent Departments to ensure policy consistency	✓	✓	
Encouragement of PPN Representative input into the agenda and meetings by the local authority	✓	✓	
Strengthening member engagement	✓	✓	
Changes to the SPC overall structure	✓	✓	
Formal meetings between the PPN and senior local authority staff on areas of collaboration	✓	✓	
Agreeing a policy-development work programme	✓	✓	
Receipt of agendas and reading materials in good time in advance of meetings	✓	✓	
Better integration into the local authority decision-making process	✓	✓	
Greater understanding of the roles of the various committees	✓	✓	
Improved communications with local authority staff and Representatives on Boards and Committees	✓	✓	
Greater equality of input at Committees and Boards	✓	✓	

A5 – Issues & Recommendations from Previous Reports

The following table provides an overview of findings and recommendations that have been documented in previous reports in recent years.

Issues / Recommendations relevant to the PPNs from previous reports	PPNSN Strategy Paper on Progress Made in 2019 – 2020	Annual Report 2020	Annual Report 2019	PPN 2020 – A Case Study	Delivering Deliberative Democracy 2021	Local Government Engaging & Empowering Local Communities 2020	The Contribution of Active Retirement Ireland Members to Local Decision making 2018	Community Participation in South Dublin 2015
Governance								
A greater level of assistance ought to be provided at national level on issues such as governance, finance policies, legal status etc. At present, the local approach results in PPNs around the country navigating the same issues separately, which is not incredibly efficient or consistent.	✓		✓					
Ensure current governance structures are in place and operating effectively		✓						
Ensure a MOU is in place and fit for purpose		✓						
Consider introducing key performance indicators (KPIs)		✓						
Where applicable, develop and use the Vision for Community Well-being		✓						

Building awareness of Sustainable Development Goals and linking them to all county & PPN plans		✓						
Development and standardisation of policies for the operation of the PPNs.		✓	✓					
Balance between consistency across PPNs and flexibility for local arrangements	✓							
Provision of detailed guidance on the respective roles involved in the PPNs.		✓	✓					
Develop a strategic vision for PPNs and enrich it with local experience		✓	✓	✓				
Clarify the ratifications process of the Environmental Pillar.		✓	✓					
Management and control of budgets	✓							
Draw on change management insights				✓				
Learn, reflect to guide evolving development				✓				
ARI and/or ARA to seek to influence processes of OPCs and PPNs to ensure they reflect good practice							✓	
There is a need for an independent evaluation of the PPN process, one focussed on the impact of the new regime on policy, practice and resource allocation rather than the performance on numerical indicators.								✓
Promotion of PPNs / Communication								

Public awareness and communications strategies such as a national promotional and information campaign for PPNs	✓	✓	✓			✓		
Continued promotion of the PPN to the local community as well as nationally by inclusion in programmes by stakeholders/partners to ensure we reach as many organisations as possible, under each pillar		✓						
Simplify the language used		✓						
Celebrate success				✓				
Creation of a national logo for PPNs.			✓					
Greater national recognition of PPNs across all relevant Government Departments.		✓	✓					
Develop a methodology pack for local authority staff on public engagement.		✓	✓					
Raise awareness of OPCs and PPNs amongst Active Retirement Ireland (ARI) members and/or Active Retirement Associations (ARA)							✓	
Participation & Engagement								
Build on relationships and links forged during 2020		✓						
Increased role of PPN in the climate change action agenda		✓						
Enhance the collaboration between the PPN and the local authority		✓	✓					
More meaningful engagement:		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure local authorities adhere to the requirement that PPNs act as the main route for community consultation and representation. • Dedicate resources from within the Department, to ensure meaningful engagement. • Plan carefully and choose the appropriate level and method of engagement • The need for government to consult in a meaningful, multidimensional way with those affected by its proposals 								
Representative from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government be appointed to the PPN National Advisory Group to closer align the PPNs and policies of Local Government.			✓					
Senior local authority staff to engage with PPNs.		✓	✓					
Develop and implement more effective communications structures for Representatives and their Boards / Committees, to include updates on community development initiatives		✓	✓					
Varying levels of PPN participation in interagency forums such as SPCs and LCDCs	✓							
Develop a more robust input mechanism at Municipal District level, particularly in terms of LECsPs.			✓					
Adopt the basic principles of engagement for local decision-making.		✓	✓					

Explore the development of thematic linkage groups		✓	✓					
Develop a local authority handbook, such as that provided by the IPA, to provide a detailed breakdown of each department within the local authority		✓	✓					
Initiatives in relation to people with disabilities	✓							
Review the local authority structures against the Council of Europe's Framework					✓			
Further qualitative research to explore best practice solutions in relation to the principles of participation.					✓			
Build in monitoring and evaluation of engagement initiatives.						✓		
For OPCs and PPNs to ensure improved policy-making processes that facilitate input at all stages of the policy-making cycle – meaningful engagement (not just provide involvement via attending meetings and information)							✓	
Resources								
Review the reasons for staff turnover		✓						
Covid -19 highlighted the need for adequate and where needed, additional resources.		✓						
Maximise and build on the advances in digital communications		✓						
Increased supports to newly formed groups		✓						

Ensure Support Workers are permanent staff.		✓	✓					
Implementation of a National Resource Worker to support the PPNs at national level.		✓	✓					
Review grading structure of PPN staff.		✓	✓					
Publish a report on staff resources to include the number of staff who left the PPNs in 2019.		✓	✓					
Increased budget for PPNs at local and national level		✓	✓					
Ensure sustainability of funding for PPNs.		✓	✓					
Ensure security of funding.		✓	✓					
Insurance for PPN Secretariat members	✓							
Match resources with emerging needs				✓				
Use external resources and facilitators where appropriate and/or feasible, while building internal capacity, support, and appetite for engagement and innovation.						✓		
Share learning and experience between local authorities and look to partner with others where possible in order to make better use of available resources.						✓		
The need to resolve the issue of the secretariat and worker. There are two aspects: • Secretariat should be enabled to develop its own systems and structures to enable it to carry out its								✓

functions of coordination, communication and management; • The resource worker must work directly to the secretariat and be an independent post uncompromised by the local authority or host organization.								
Structure								
Review the structure of the PPNs		✓						
Develop a National Structure – Public Participation Ireland		✓						
Simplify the structure of the PPNs.		✓	✓					
The three pillar process should be retained and the numerical imbalance of the three pillars should be addressed, not by reducing the size of the social inclusion and environmental representation, but by building their capacity.								✓
Enable the establishment of the role of Chairperson of the Secretariat, rotating annually.		✓	✓					
Make the PPNs part of the statutory development plan for the Local Area Plans and Co-Development Plans.		✓	✓					
Accountability and reporting relationships between PPN representatives and PPN Secretariats/ Resource Workers	✓							
The role of PPN Plenary meetings within the overall PPN process	✓							
Hosting arrangements	✓							

Voluntary and community organizations must restate the case for the value of investing in community infrastructure, especially in areas of low social capital.								✓
Relationships								
Invest in relationships				✓				
A dialogue between the local authorities and the other PPN Stakeholders to establish practical and best-practice approaches to implementing the principles of participation and supporting community platforms					✓			✓
Training								
Capacity building: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> for Member Groups re engagement on Boards and Committees. of ARI / ARA members for continued and ongoing contribution to local structures 			✓				✓	
Regional training for Representatives.			✓					
Provide a more inclusive induction programme for Representatives and Elected Councillors.			✓					

<p>Training for LA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refresher training on the role and function of the PPN, and how it is of benefit to the local authority. • Community Development training and briefing sessions. • Induction training for local authority staff and elected members, procured at a national level for consistency. • Training on the development and uses of the Vision for Community Wellbeing. • Information session on the Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities Strategy. • Training on guidelines for consultations by local authorities. • Public engagement and the role of the PPN. • IT Skills. • Effective engagement of marginalised groups. • Human Rights and Equality / Public Sector Duty. • The Sustainable Development Goals. • Communications training. 		✓	✓					
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<p>Training for PPNs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salesforce. • Advocacy and Influencing Policy. • Local authority structures. • Public Speaking and Communications. • Governance. • Data Protection. • Induction for Secretariat Members and Representatives on their respective roles. • Policy Development and Decision-making. • Human Rights and Equality / Public Sector Duty. • The Sustainable Development Goals. • Strategic Planning. • How to write submissions. • Charities Regulation. • Social Media. • IT Skills. 		✓	✓					
<p>Training for PPNs: Holding effective meetings/facilitation</p>		✓						
Partnership								
<p>Partnership for LAs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased communications • Other Departments should be made aware of the PPNs and their role 		✓						

<p>Partnership for LAs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness raising of the PPN and its functions and objectives • Induction for Representatives on local authority boards and committees • More lead-in time for initiatives, meetings, consultations and other collaborations between local authorities and PPNs • Collaborative planning with all stakeholders • Regular updates from the local authority • Local authorities to provide information on the roles and functions of local authority Boards and Committees • PPN to be referenced as a form of participation in the Local Authority Guidelines • Increased knowledge of the importance of the PPN contribution to policy making, drawing on existing Government materials 		✓	✓					
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<p>Partnership for PPNs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link with other statutory partners through their parent Departments to ensure policy consistency • Encouragement of PPN Representative input into the agenda and meetings by the local authority • Strengthening member engagement • Changes to the SPC overall structure • Formal meetings between the PPN and senior local authority staff on areas of collaboration • Agreeing a policy-development work programme • Receipt of agendas and reading materials in good time in advance of meetings • Better integration into the local authority decision-making process • Greater understanding of the roles of the various committees • Improved communications with local authority staff and Representatives on Boards and Committees • Greater equality of input at Committees and Boards 		✓	✓					
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A6 – High-level Benchmarking Summary

As part of the review, a high-level desk-based benchmarking exercise was carried out which was limited to publicly available information.

This exercise looked at structures in place in New Zealand and Scotland as agreed with the Department. Sweden was also examined but was not considered a suitable comparator. We understand the PPNs are unique and do not have a direct comparator, however there were a number of aspects of the Scottish model of Community Planning Partnerships (CPP) that could be considered by the PPNs. These included:

- A support portal is in place which provides links to tools and information to the community from partner agencies such as the NHS and Education Scotland.
- The CPPs use a Participation Request form, where community groups can request to be involved in decisions to services that affect their communities.
- An engagement hub on their websites where people can view a list of upcoming consultation events or can submit details of a consultation event to be displayed.

As per the requirements from early in the project, the Principles underpinning the activities of the PPNs were assessed against the *OECD Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for Public Decision Making* (see purple boxes in image below) and the *European Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in Decision-making Processes* (see first column in image below).

Please note: For the benchmarking exercise, where Principles were explicitly called out and aligned to the OECD Principles, they were marked in green, and where structures or practices were known to be in place to fulfil those principles, these were marked in blue. This exercise was based on publicly available information and therefore required a level of interpretation.

	European Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in Decision Making	PPN Ireland	CPP Scotland	New Zealand
Purpose		✓	✓	
Accountability	✓	✓	✓	
Transparency	✓	✓		✓
Inclusiveness	✓	✓	✓	✓
Representativeness		✓		✓
Information	✓	✓	✓	
Group Deliberation		✓	✓	
Time		✓		✓
Integrity	✓	✓		
Privacy				
Evaluation		✓	✓	

**Note: Green refers to instances where principle is explicitly stated*

While there is an assumption that GDPR is being adhered to none of the benchmarks explicitly called out Privacy as a principle nor specified details in relation to it.

A7 – Diversity & Inclusion Overview

The following appendix was included to provide the Department with some context and guidance on a range of initiatives to consider for the PPNs.

Quick Wins

There are numerous quick-wins and long-term actions organisations can take to address D&I from a cultural point of view. This can include facilitating meetings at a more accessible time for stakeholders (for example, after normal working hours when majority of stakeholders are volunteers). The buy-in of senior stakeholders is key to top-down positive change in an organisation's culture. The Department and the National Advisory Group should engage and promote the Diversity & Inclusion agenda of the PPNs.

Organisation Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

An organisation's commitment to D&I is a statement that the organisation is committed to embedding diversity and inclusion into everything it does.

Tips:

- Be authentic.
- Make it tailored to the organisation.
- It should represent organisational values.
- It should provide a clear outline on how business goals will be reached and how they relate to the overall strategy.

D&I Strategy

D&I Strategies should be designed to align with objectives in order for D&I to become a fundamental part of overall strategy. This alignment ensures that management becomes accountable for D&I implementation as any other part of overall strategy.

The introduction of a D&I strategy for the PPNs would ensure that D&I initiatives and policies have a robust framework for implementation which is supported by senior stakeholders such as the Department or the NAG, and can support the achievement of goals, including ways of addressing the diverse needs of stakeholders. A strategy can also be a beneficial tool for collating all current and planned D&I initiatives and policies into a singular, overarching goal/target which can be delivered over a set period of time, ensuring that initiatives do not become lost or abandoned.

D&I Champions

D&I Champions should be appointed to drive engagement with D&I in their respective sections or in each local PPN. Champions are considered role models for D&I, taking initiative to demonstrate new actions and initiatives for D&I. They also serve as a conduit for staff / volunteers within each section to speak to and flag their views, opinions or experiences on a confidential, informal basis.

Policies to support D&I

The following policies can help to support diversity, inclusion and equality:

- Diversity and inclusion policy;
- Code of Conduct for Employees;
- Dignity at work;
- Disciplinary policy;
- Grievance policy;
- Gender identity and expression policy;
- Training and Development policy;
- Protected Disclosure (Whistleblowing) policy.;
- Equal opportunities policy;
- Employment of persons with a disability policy;

- Recruitment and selection policy;
- Performance management policy;
- Probation policy;
- Remote working policy;
- Protected leave policies;
- Working hours policy;
- Core meeting hours policy;
- Competency framework.

These policies should be reviewed and updated regularly and comply with legislative requirements and good practice in Irish employment. Consideration should be given towards developing the above policies for PPNs if not already in place.

D&I Training

There are several considerations around the roll-out of D&I training. It should not be considered as a quick and cursory training course delivered as a once off for compliance purposes with no expectation of a return on behavioural outcomes.

D&I training should be considered as an obligation and not a “nice to have”. In addition, training on D&I should be designed to be relevant to individuals and their roles, maximising the value gained and understood from training interventions.

Organisations should consider the following when designing learning and development solutions:

- Build inclusion and diversity concepts and practices into training courses, management training and teambuilding programmes to increase awareness of the need to handle different views, perceptions and ideas in positive ways.
- Consider awareness-raising programmes, such as ‘lunch and learn’ sessions, about various aspects of diversity to help people appreciate difference.
- Include diversity issues in induction programmes so that all new people know about the organisation’s values and policies.

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