



Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí
Offaly County Council



STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE SCHEME
Offaly County Council
2024 – 2029

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Introduction

In accordance with the provisions of Section 48 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended by Section 41 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, the Council shall establish by resolution committees to be known as Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) to consider matters connected with the formulation, development, monitoring and review of policy which relate to the functions of the local authority and to advise the Council on those matters.

Corporate Policy Group (CPG)

CPG Structure

The CPG comprises of:

1. the Cathaoirleach of Offaly County Council as its chair;
2. the Chairperson of each of the Strategic Policy Committees, and
3. in the case of a municipal district without an SPC chair, a representative of the Municipal District concerned.

The CPG links the work of the different SPCs, acts as a sort of cabinet and provides a forum where policy positions affecting the whole Council can be agreed for submission to the full Council. An Cathaoirleach will report to the Council on the work of the CPG.

CPG Role

The CPG, like an SPC, is a committee of the Council.

Its task is to advise and assist the Council, with full decision-making authority remaining with the Council. The Cathaoirleach reports to the full Council on the work of the CPG. In such context, it is a matter for each Council, in co-operation with the Chief Executive, to determine the range of responsibilities and tasks of the CPG.

The CPG should:

- Play a key role in preparing the Budget and Corporate Plan;
- Provide input to the full Council on any matter of general concern to the Council either on its own initiative or following a request from the Council;

- Determine responsibility for discharge of reserved functions as between the municipal district level (or a specific municipal district) and the local authority, where a question of consistency or avoidance of unnecessary duplication is referred to it by the Chief Executive;
- Monitor the overall performance of a local authority, including in relation to matters of governance and oversight, though consideration of reports of the Audit Committee, Local Government Auditor and National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC), and in accordance with the Local Government Code of Governance;
- Deal with overall issues in relation to service delivery plans, customer service, value for money, etc., (individual SPCs would deal with such issues in their work insofar as their service remit was concerned);
- Approve the work programmes of the SPCs and monitor their achievement;
- Co-ordinate the work of the SPCs;
- Request SPCs to consider policy issues; where appropriate; and
- Provide feedback to the SPCs on Council policy and views in areas relevant to the SPCs.

Role and Objectives of Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs)

The Council is and remains the decision-making authority, and the task of the SPCs, as committees of the Council, is to advise and assist the Council in its work. While it is the task of each SPC to assist the Council in the formulation and development of policy, the final policy decisions rest ultimately with the full Council. The SPC system is intended to give Councillors and relevant sectoral interests an opportunity for full involvement in the policy-making process from early stages, when policy options are more fluid. A key role for SPCs will be to focus on strategic issues and in taking a strategic overview of relevant policy areas in the wider context. *Accordingly:*

- SPCs should adopt a multi-annual work programme linked to the local authority's Corporate Plan and update regularly as necessary.
- The SPCs will be represented by the SPC Chairperson at Council meetings.

- Each SPC's work will take account of the Council's overall corporate policy and objectives, comply with statutory provisions, integrate with statutory plans where relevant, and link realistically to financial resources and be responsive to sectoral consultations.
- The SPC may seek the attendance of public authorities at a meeting for the purpose of assisting in developing policy.
- The CPG should co-ordinate the work and monitor the work programmes of the SPCs.
- The SPCs play a crucial role in delivering of Sustainable Development Goals at local level. When considering and proposing policy all SPCs should identify how the proposed policy will impact on the relevant Sustainable Development Goals.

Lobbying Act 2015 - Transparency Code

The Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 (the Act) is designed to provide information to the public regarding who is lobbying whom about what. Individuals and organisations who participate in Strategic Policy Committees established by local authorities may have obligations under the Act.



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A critical element of public policy formulations by the Strategic Policy Committees is the availability to the local authorities of expertise, skills and knowledge from persons outside of the public service. Where membership of the Committee comprises of at least one person who, for the purposes of the Act is a Designated Public Official, it may be the case that communications within the group could be considered lobbying communications. The person making these communications may be required to register as a lobbyist and to submit a return of this communication to the Lobbying Register.

However, the Act provides for an exception from the requirement to register in such cases once specified transparency criteria have been put in place. A transparency code was published by the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform to address this situation. Communications between members of Strategic Policy Committee about the work of the Committee would be exempt where the group in question complies with the Transparency Code.

Strategic Policy Group Structure

The SPC structure provides for the establishment of four SPCs as follows:

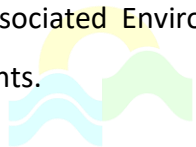
1. Housing & Integration Policy.
 2. Economic Development Planning and Regeneration Policy.
 3. Climate Action Transport and Environment Policy.
 4. Community, Culture and Emergency Service Policy.
- Each member of Offaly County Council to be a member of at least one SPC.
 - The SPCs will meet as frequently as necessary and at least once every quarter.
 - Each SPC to have at least one third of its membership from sectors relevant to the committee's remit.
 - Each committee will arrange its own business and proceedings (including the fixing of dates and times of meetings) subject to any, if necessary, amendment of the Council's Standing Orders.
 - The full Council will appoint the Chairperson of each SPC from amongst the elected members appointed by the Council.
 - The Chairperson of each SPC will hold office for a minimum period of three years which may be renewed by the Council.
 - Generally, membership (both Councillors and representatives of sectoral interests) of SPC will be for the lifetime of the Council.
 - Each SPC will prepare annually a draft work plan for the approval of the Council and will formally report on this work plan at least annually.

Sectoral Interests

The Scheme provides for Sectoral Interests to be represented as follows:

- Agriculture/Farming
- Environmental/Conservation
- Development/Construction
- Business/Commercial
- Trade Union
- Community/Voluntary
- Social Inclusion.

The nomination process for representatives from the Agricultural/Farming; Business/Commercial; Development/Construction and Trade Union sectors will be facilitated and agreed by the National Social Partners Pillars for those sectors while the nomination for the Environment/Conservation representatives will be facilitated by the environmental pillar and the associated Environmental College under the Public Participation Network (PPN) arrangements.



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The nomination process for the Environmental/Conservation Community/Voluntary and Social sectors will be determined based on a local nomination process through the PPN.

Member Organisations when joining the PPN at a county level must opt to be a part of one of three electoral colleges within the PPN:

- Environment
- Social Inclusion
- Community / Voluntary

SPC MEMBERSHIP

Housing & Integration Policy

9 Members

Chairperson Designate	Councillor Noel Cribbin	1
Members	Councillors	4
Sectoral Interest	Business / Commercial, Development / Construction	1
	Community / Voluntary (PPN)	2
	Social Inclusion (PPN)	1

Economic Development Planning & Regeneration

10 Members

Chairperson Designate	Councillor Frank Moran	1
Members	Councillors	4
Sectoral Interest	Agriculture / Farming	1
	Business / Commercial, Development / Construction	1
	Community / Voluntary (PPN)	1
	Environmental / Conservation (PPN)	1
	Trade Union	1

Climate Action Transport and Environment Policy SPC

11 Members

Chairperson Designate	Councillor Oliver Bryant	1
Members	Councillors	4
Sectoral Interest	Agriculture / Farming	1
	Business / Commercial	1
	Development / Construction	1
	Community / Voluntary (PPN)	1
	Environmental / Conservation (PPN)	1
	Trade Union	1

Community, Culture and Emergency Service Policy

9 Members

Chairperson Designate	Councillor Sean O'Brien	1
Members	Councillors	4
Sectoral Interest	Agriculture / Farming	1
	Environmental / Conservation (PPN)	1
	Social Inclusion (PPN)	1
	Community / Voluntary (PPN)	1



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SPC Meetings & Procedures

The SPC chair and relevant Director of Service should meet in advance of an SPC meeting to clarify the agenda for meetings, agreeing objectives and discussing expected outcomes. Each SPC shall have an annual work programme linked to the Offaly County Council's Corporate Plan, should target policy/plan developments and include such reviews as are considered appropriate. In addition, Offaly County Council should engage / involve, as far as possible, all members of SPCs in drawing up the agenda.

A calendar of SPC meetings should be agreed upon at the start of each year. There should be a minimum of 2 SPC meetings per year, although Offaly County Council SPCs meet on average once per quarter due to demands of the work programme. Meetings shall be conducted in an informal but efficient manner at venues and times to be decided annually in advance by the committee. Hybrid meetings can also be held. The SPC meeting calendar should be structured in such a way as to fit in with policy-making timeframes, including statutory timeframes, to allow SPCs to perform their role in supporting the plenary council's policy-making as fully as possible.



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SPC meetings should be conducted in an informal and collaborative atmosphere that would allow honest views and opinions on policy issues. To facilitate this, Offaly County Council will survey SPC members to get their views on how to improve participation at meetings and consider making use of the principles set out in the Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making, published by the Department of Rural and Community Development in 2023.

External nominees should be familiar with the subject area of their committees. Where agreement is reached on recommendations of an SPC to the full Council the Chairperson of the SPC, or his/her nominee, shall present the recommendation to the full Council. The outcome of the Council's considerations of the SPC's recommendation should likewise be reported back to the SPC and Sectoral Representatives should also report to their relevant bodies.

Requirement to have Regard to the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy

There is a requirement on each SPC to have regard to Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES), prepared by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA). This strategic plan which identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides appropriate policy responses in the form of Regional Policy Objectives.

Ethics Framework

The ethical requirement of Section 177 of the Local Government Act 2001 shall apply to all members of SPC (Disclosure by a member of pecuniary or any other beneficial interests).

Training:

Offaly County Council will provide ongoing training and support for members of the SPCs to support them in their work:

- Workshops on policy to cover the various areas within the remit of the Strategic Policy Committees.
- Briefings on the role and functions of Local Government and Strategic Policy Committees.
- Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 and Transparency Code.
- Standing Orders and the regulation of SPC meetings.

Expenses

The local authority will pay travel expenses to the PPN nominees to facilitate their participation in the SPC process.

Assistance from Public Authorities

Section 48(3A) of the 2001 Act (inserted by Section 41(d) of the 2014 Act) empowers an SPC to seek the attendance of public authorities at a meeting to assist it in developing policy. A request to a public authority to attend a meeting of an SPC should:

- set out the issue on which advice is being sought, including providing any policy papers of the local authority, or draft policy papers, and the linkages to the policy responsibility of the public authority and

- provide at least one month’s notice, or a shorter interval if mutually agreed.

The Act provides for the public authority to assist the SPC in the formulation of its policy by the SPC. The purpose of the provision is to give an additional resource in formulating policy and to strengthen linkages between local authorities and public bodies with wider responsibilities in the sectoral area in which the SPC operates. The invitation to attend a meeting of an SPC cannot be used to query the public authority in the performance of its functions or duties.

Process of Establishment of Strategic Policy Committees

Sequence of Events	Timescale
Draft Scheme to be considered by Council	July 2024
Council to seek nomination from National Pillars and PPN	July 2024
Advise Council of nominations from the sectors to SPCs and Council to adopt Scheme	September 2024
First meeting of Strategic Policy Committees	Quarter 4 2024

Nomination Process by Local Bodies

Offaly PPN is the main link through which the local authority connects with the community, voluntary, and environmental sectors without prejudice to other consultation processes. The aim of the structures and processes is to facilitate and enable the public and organisations to articulate a diverse range of views and interests within the local government system, not to reduce or homogenise this diversity. The forum is open to membership to groups in the county who are dealing with local needs in a range of areas – economic, social, cultural, environmental, etc. For the purpose of this structured public participation within local government, individuals may join an existing group or organisation, or they can establish an interest group or organisation and register it with the PPN. Member organisations when joining the PPN at a county level must opt to be a part of one of three electoral colleges within the PPN:

- Environment
- Social Inclusion
- Community and Voluntary



The Public Participation Networks must operate in a manner that recognises that the sectors are broad and made up of people with many different opinions. It is not expected that the Public Participation Networks will come up with a ‘one voice response’ but that it will feed back the issues and suggestions raised by a broad range of environmental, community and & voluntary groups. It is recognised that where contradictory responses are presented to the local authority, the ultimate responsibility for resolving these in the finalisation of policies will rest with the elected members.

To join the Environment Electoral College, an organisation’s primary objectives and activities must be environmental (i.e. ecological) protection and/or environmental sustainability.

To join the Social Inclusion Electoral College an organisation’s primary objectives and activities must focus on social inclusion/social justice/equality.

Organisations whose primary objectives are other than those listed above will be members of the Community and Voluntary Electoral College.

In the interests of equity and transparency, the selected members should be representative of local organisations active in the county, because it is the local perspective of the representative pillars that the members would be expected to bring to the SPCs.



Nomination Process by National Pillars

As laid down in the Strategic Policy Committee Guidelines, representation from the National Pillars will be arranged as follows:

- Farming Pillar: Agricultural/Farming
- Business & Employers Pillar: Development, Construction, Business, Commercial
- Trade Union Pillar – Trade Union.

National Contact Points of Key Stakeholders Pillar

	Name and Address	Email / Telephone
Farming	Irish Farmers Association (IFA), Irish Farm Centre, Bluebell, Dublin 12	info@ifa.ie
Business	Chambers Ireland, 22-24 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2	info@chambers.ie
Trade Unions	Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), Head Office, 31-32 Parnell Square, Dublin 1	deirdre.mannion@ictu.ie 01-889 7726
Environment	Irish Environmental Network Macro Community Resource Centre, 1 Green Street, Dublin 7	office@ien.ie 01 878 0116

Appointment Principles

The following principles apply to:

(a) Appointment of County Council Members

- Each Member of County Council shall, as a matter of equity and good practice, have the opportunity to serve on an SPC.
- Council Members may not be nominated to represent sectoral interests.
- SPC Membership for Council Members shall be for the lifetime of the Council. A person ceasing to be a Member shall automatically cease membership of the SPC.
- Council Members shall not serve on more than two SPCs insofar as possible, again for reasons of equity and good practice and workload.
- SPC Council membership shall reflect the proportionality and the local distribution of elected representation on the County Council.
- The Chairs of the SPCs shall be appointed by the County Council from the Council Member appointees to the SPC for a minimum period of 3 years.
- The allocation of the SPC chairs shall also reflect equitably the spread of elected representation on the County Council.

(b) Appointment of Sectoral Interests

- Nominees shall be active within the area of the local authority and have a County-wide impact or, at minimum, relevance in a locality or number of localities in the area.
- Where appropriate nominating groups/associations must be open to new members, hold AGMs and regular meetings, and should be broadly representative and accountable.
- Nominating groups should also consider nominees from single interest groups where appropriate.
- Local Development Agencies represented at Strategy Group/LCDC level shall not be represented on an SPC.
- Each sector shall select its own nominee(s). The nomination of sectoral representatives is the sole responsibility of each sector.
- It is desirable that sectoral nominees retain membership of the SPC for the life of the Council. It is open to each nominating sector to deselect its nominee, if felt necessary, and to notify the Council accordingly whereupon the person would cease to be a member. In such cases the relevant sector shall nominate a new representative.

Public Participation Network (PPN) Structures

Outline of structure

The Public Participation Network (PPN) will be organised at County and Municipal District level. Each PPN will have:

- A County Plenary at County level which deals with county level issues
- A Municipal District Plenary in each Municipal District which deals with issues at a municipal level
- Linkage Groups which deal with specific issues
- A secretariat at county level that is a facilitation and communication mechanism.

Details on these structures are provided below.

Municipal District Public Participation Network (PPN)

Under the Local Government Reform Act 2014, each county is divided into Municipal Districts. Each Municipal District will have a Public Participation Network (PPN). This is made up of community, voluntary and environmental organisations within the Municipal District. These organisations work together on agreed objectives based on promoting the well-being of this and future generations. Where the local authority would find operation of the Network as sub-Municipal District level advantageous, this can be provided for.

Municipal District Plenary

The Plenary is the ruling body of the Municipal District PPN and is made up of all registered community, environmental and voluntary organisations in the District.

Each Member Organisation will have one vote. They may select two people to represent them on Plenary of the Municipal District PPN. One of these people will be the main *Representative* and the other the *Alternate*.

The plenary of each Municipal District PPN will meet formally at least twice a year. The initial meeting in year one will be convened by the County/City Council after which the Municipal District PPN makes its own arrangements.

Each Municipal District PPN will commence its work by going through a process to set out what it considers necessary to promote well-being for present and future generations.

The PPN in each Municipal District has the freedom to engage as it sees fit in whatever way it wishes to promote local development and in this way it can harness local capacity and strengthen local development in a very real manner.

The Plenary of each Municipal District PPN nominates one person to the Secretariat for the County/City PPN.

Member organisations of the Municipal District PPN may also be members of the City/County PPN.

In order for the Network to work effectively, it is recommended that there is one County Register for all environmental, voluntary and social inclusion groups.

All groups must be registered by an agreed date in any given year, in order to have voting rights in the following year.

Network registration forms should be completed annually by organisations in the Public Participation Networks (PPN).

County/City PPN:

All registered organisations in the County/City are members of the County/City PPN. The PPN will be the main channel through which people will be selected to participate in various processes of the County/City Councils and their Boards/Committees.

Participants will be chosen by the PPN and should not be rejected by the County Council or any of its structures. Likewise, the Council or its structures should not bypass the PPN in choosing representatives from the social inclusion, environmental or voluntary sectors to sit on any of its Boards/Committees.

County/City Plenary

At a county level the Plenary is the ruling body of the PPN

Member organisations are represented on the Plenary of the County/City PPN.

The County/City PPN Plenary will meet formally at least twice a year. The first meeting in year 1 will be organised by the Local Authority after which the County/City PPN Plenary will make its own arrangements.

Each Member Organisation will have one vote. They may select two people to represent them on the Plenary. One of these people will be the main *Representative* and the other the *Alternate*.

A Plenary Meeting shall be deemed a valid meeting if at least 15% of the Member Organisations are represented and also only if at least 4 of those present are members of the Secretariat. There must also be an automatic and guaranteed 21 days' notice of the meeting.

Secretariat

Each City/County PPN will have a Secretariat whose role is to

- Facilitate the implementation of the decisions of the Plenary
- Ensure the proper functioning of the PPN in between Plenaries
- Coordinate activities of PPN
- Communicate extensively and regularly with all PPN members and in this process disseminate information concerning all PPN activities as widely as possible
- Manage the resource worker who will be provided to PPN at a county level to enable them in delivering their objectives

The Secretariat will meet at least four times a year. The Secretariat will be made up of:

- one representative nominated from each of the Municipal District PPNs
- An equal number of representatives from each of the electoral colleges of the PPN, i.e. Community, Social Inclusion, and Environment. The minimum should be two from each.

The Secretariat should be provided with an office and have a resource worker. There should be provision for agenda-setting, including of matters of importance to the local authority.

Linkage Groups

The Linkage Group mechanism is central to ensuring that:

- All member organisations are enabled to participate in shaping the decisions that affect them that are being developed by any structure of the County/City Council.
- All member organisations play a direct role in choosing their participants in County/City Council structures addressing particular issues.
- The views of all those involved will be communicated within the relevant County/City structure.
- All member organisations will be fully up to date with developments in all of these County/City structures.

This is how the Linkage Groups work.

1. When the County/City Council has public participant seats to fill on any of its committees/structures it will notify the PPN Secretariat and ask that the representatives to fill these seats be chosen by the PPN.

2. The Secretariat will then

- Notify ALL member organisations in the County/City of this situation, and
- Arrange a time and place for a meeting of all those organisations with an interest/involvement in the issue(s) being addressed by the particular body or, in the case of places representing particular interests of communities, those organisations which fit the relevant criteria. **This group will constitute a PPN 'Linkage Group' for this particular body and the topic(s) being addressed.**
- The Linkage Group will choose their representative(s) for the body.
- The person(s) chosen to represent the PPN in such bodies will meet their Linkage Group regularly.
- The Linkage Group should operate as their reference group on the issues arising.
- They will report back to the Linkage Group after every meeting.

- They will take direction from the Linkage Group on the positions they are to take on particular issues.

Each representative taking up such a position for the PPN must

- Represent the views of all the members of the Linkage Group and not just those of their own organisation.
- Abide by the communications protocols set out above.



APPENDIX 1

INDICATIVE LIST OF POLICY ISSUES

Housing & Integration Policy SPC

- Consideration of social housing policies including Rent and Allocation Schemes.
- Role of L.A. Housing/Voluntary/Private housing options.
- Homeless Policy and Supports.
- Home ownership supports including housing loans and grants.
- Housing Estate Management / Tenant Participation Policies /Anti-Social Behaviour.
- Traveller Accommodation Policy (subject to provisions re. Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee).
- Migrant Integration.

Economic Development Planning and Regeneration Policy SPC



- On-going review and monitoring of economic development policies and objectives, in particular the Offaly Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027 and any successor.
- On-going review and monitoring of County Development Plan policies.
- Input into preparation of the Offaly Development Contribution Scheme 2025/6-2029/30.
- Preparation of the economic elements of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP).
- The review of the implementation of the economic elements of the LECP.
- Ongoing review of Local Enterprise Office activities and policies promoting enterprise development and entrepreneurship.
- Industrial Development Policies.
- Job Creation / Maintenance Policies.
- Policy linkage – I.D.A., Enterprise Ireland, Solas, Fáilte Ireland and other local development initiatives.
- Tourism Promotion / Development.
- Impact of National and Regional Policies.
- Forward Planning – policy development and review.
- Heritage, Conservation and Biodiversity.

- Sustainable development issues.
- Linkages with other policy committees.
- Review on an ongoing basis of overall strategy for rural development.
- Just Transition – policy issues.
- Programme and policies on Urban and Rural Renewal, Regeneration, Town Centre First.

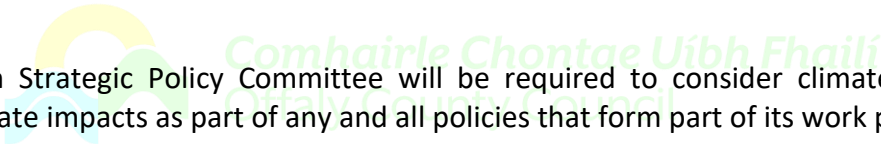
Climate Action Transport and Environment Policy SPC

- Climate Action Plan.
- Community Climate Action.
- Energy Management.
- Environmental and Climate Action Public Awareness and Education.
- Flood Resilience.
- Pollution Control Policy.
- Water Quality Management Plan.
- Waste Management Policy.
- Litter Management Policy.
- Environmental Enforcement.
- Rural Water Services and Capital Programme priorities.
- Burial Ground Provision and Maintenance.
- Animal Health and Food Protection Policy.
- Ongoing review of National / Regional / Local Roads Policies.

Policies relating to the role of transportation system:

- Social
 - Economic
 - Environment
 - Employment.
- Rural / Urban Transportation issues.
 - Active Travel and Greenway policy.
 - Traffic Management Policies.
 - Road Safety.
 - Public Lighting Policy.

Community, Culture and Emergency Service Policy SPC

- Local and Community Development.
 - Social Inclusion.
 - Healthy Offaly.
 - Age Friendly
 - Sports Partnership.
 - Comhairle na nÓg.
 - Library Development Policies.
 - Artistic and Cultural Policies.
 - Major Emergency Management.
 - Fire Prevention, Fire Protection and Fire Safety.
 - Civil Defence.
 - Building Control.
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- Each Strategic Policy Committee will be required to consider climate action and climate impacts as part of any and all policies that form part of its work programme.
 - Offaly County Council will promote as best as possible the use of the Irish Language in the work of all the Strategic Policy Committees.