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Constitution

**Version history**

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# Introduction

The Public Participation Network (PPN) is the main link through which the local authority connects with the community, voluntary and environmental sectors.

Section 46 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 enables local authorities to take all appropriate steps to consult with and promote effective participation of local communities in local government. Citizens and communities are encouraged and supported to participate in the decision-making processes of the local authority.

The mechanism for public engagement and participation outlined is called the Public Participation Network (PPN). Its primary objective is to enable the public to take an active formal role in the policy making and oversight activities of the local authority’s areas of responsibility.

The participation of all citizens in public life and discourse and their right to influence decisions that affect their lives and communities are at the centre of democracy.

The PPN facilitates access to participation in the decision-making process at local government level and their active role in the policy making and oversight activities of Dublin City Council.

Community groups and organisations that wish to participate must be a member of the PPN.

# Name

The organisation’s name is Dublin City Participation Network otherwise referred to as Dublin City PPN or the PPN.

# Aims

The aims of Dublin City PPN is to:

* Coordinate and support the participation and representation of the community, voluntary, social inclusion and environmental sectors in Dublin City in the policymaking process;
* Build the capacity of member groups to partake in same; and
* Serve as a networking and information hub for volunteer-led organisations.

# Role

In achieving its aims, the role of Dublin City PPN is to:

* Actively recruit member organisation groups comprising of Social Inclusion, Community and Voluntary and Environmental Pillars.
* Monitor and evaluate existing policies relating to Dublin City to ascertain their impact on the Community and advocate for change.
* Actively support the inclusion of groups such as those socially excluded or marginalized.
* Develop effective systems to be an information hub for member organisations.
* Offer opportunities for training that practically benefit member organisations.
* Enable peer to peer and group to group networking.
* Lead the development of a Dublin City vision for community wellbeing.
* Participate in and contribute to activities that improve the social, cultural, technological and economic opportunities for Dublin City.
* Uphold this constitution.

# Principles

The PPN is guided by the following six principles:

1. **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.
2. **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.
3. **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).
4. **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.
5. **Transparent** in everything that it does. It should communicate openly, regularly and clearly with all Member Groups.
6. **Accountable** to its Member Groups by putting good governance policies and procedures in place.

# Membership

PPN Membership is divided into three (3) Colleges. Each organisation or group must decide to participate in the “college” which represents their primary interest:

* Social Inclusion
* Environment
* Community and Voluntary

## Full membership

### Full membership criteria

Full membership of Dublin City PPN is open to community groups and organisations who:

* Have an address in Dublin City and are volunteer led (i.e. voluntary Board or Committee who are directly responsible for the organisation or group).
* Are not for profit, non-political and non-sectarian organisation.
* Are independent.
* Have at least five (5) members and are open to new members.
* Are in existence for at least three (3) months.
* Have an appropriate governance structure (formal structure) with an agreed:
  + Set of rules/financial procedures.
  + Meet regularly, at least quarterly.
* Are National Organisations if they are headquartered in Dublin City or through their Local Dublin City Branch (the local branch shall be eligible to vote and hold the representative position).

The PPN may seek copies of relevant documentation to validate membership.

### Term of membership

Once an organisation has become a member of the PPN they shall be required to reaffirm their membership details every two years prior to the Annual General Plenary Meeting in that year.

### Registration process

* Prospective members register through filling out the Dublin City PPN registration form online or on paper.
* Registration forms are processed by the PPN Secretariat through its staff who assess eligibility for membership and ensure the appropriate Electoral College has been chosen (i.e. Community, Environment and Social Inclusion).

## Associate membership

Associate Membership provides a pathway and a link between key community groups and organisations and services in Dublin City who are excluded from Full Membership, to have a voice on matters of interest.

### Rights of associate membership

Associate members can:

* Attend the PPN training and events.
* Attend Linkage Groups and Plenary and contribute to discussion; however voting rights are not extended to Associate members.
* Receive information – newsletters, meeting minutes, etc.

### Associate membership criteria

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

* Engage with or support the PPN.
* Are a valid community group, organisation or service.
* Work is related, supportive or similar fields to that of the PPN or its members.
* Agree to comply with PPN policies and constitution.

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

* Local Development Companies.
* University Departments or research centres, colleges, other third level groups or associations.
* Charitable trusts and Foundations.
* Other Civil society, voluntary and community organisations.
* Other NGOs.

### Associate membership registration process

The process of registering for associate membership is the same as that outlined in section 6.1.3.

# Governance structure

The structure of the PPN is “flat” which means all members of the PPN have an equal voice and an equal input into decision making. The governance structure is composed of the Dublin City PPN Plenary and the Dublin City PPN Secretariat.

## Plenary

* The full Membership (excluding Associate Members) is referred to as the Plenary which is the Governing Body with overall responsibility for the PPN and shall meet at least twice (2) a year in Plenary Session. The first session of the year includes the Annual General Meeting of the Membership.
* The Plenary at its Annual General Meeting elects a Secretariat which through the diversity of its membership is representative of the three (3) colleges, where vacancies have risen.
* The Plenary at its Annual General Meeting elects representatives to the Local Community Development Committee, where vacancies have risen.
* At least one (1) member from each registered group or organisation holding Full Membership shall be entitled to attend.
* Each full member organisation represented shall have one (1) vote on behalf of their organisation.
* The dates for convening Plenary Sessions shall be decided by the Plenary in session at the Annual General Meeting of the Plenary and in the absence of such decision, by the Secretariat.
* Notice of Plenary Sessions shall be circulated to all members not less than one month prior to the date of such Session.
* The Agenda shall be set by the Secretariat. Items and motions for discussion shall be forwarded by members at least ten (10) days prior to the meeting.
* All Plenary Sessions shall be conducted under Standing Orders Procedures – in consultation with members.

### Plenary quorum

* The quorum for a plenary shall be 10% of member organisations and also at least four of those present are members of the Secretariat.
* If a quorum is not available, those present may elect to proceed with either of the following:
  + Option A: The meeting should be postponed and rescheduled for a more suitable date, no later than one calendar month after the date of the original meeting. If a quorum is not present at the rescheduled meeting and provided that those in attendance consist of a simple majority (that is, half plus one) of all groups registered to attend the meeting, the number of participants present will be deemed to be the quorum and the meeting will be validly held. No objections to proceedings, including resolutions, ratifications, and decisions, of the rescheduled meeting shall be permitted on the basis that there was no valid quorum in attendance at the originally scheduled meeting.
  + Option B: Determine that the current attendance at the plenary is sufficient for the plenary to proceed. Decisions made at this plenary will be validly passed by a simple majority (that is, half plus one) of those in attendance. In any event, if over 50% of the Secretariat Members’ terms have expired by the date of the holding of the Plenary meeting, or the rescheduled Plenary meeting, whichever shall apply, the requirement that the quorum include four Secretariat Members will cease to apply.

### Extraordinary General Meetings

* Extraordinary General Meeting of full Members shall be held at any time on the decision of the Secretariat or on receipt by the Secretariat of a concise request of not more than one (1) A4 page signed by 30 full Members (excluding Associated Members) to convene such a meeting. Instructions on supports available to gather signatures are available in Appendix 2.
* The Secretariat shall decide within five (5) working days of receipt of such request the date, time, and place such a meeting shall be held which shall be not more than twenty-one (21) working days following receipt of the request by Secretariat.
* The Notice to members shall state:
  + Date, time and place of the meeting.
  + Business to be transacted.
  + Text of original request or proposal.
* The Facilitator of the Secretariat for the time being shall act as the Facilitator of the Extraordinary General Meeting or where the Facilitator fails to act the Secretariat shall appoint one of its Members to act as Facilitator. Where the Secretariat fails to appoint a Facilitator, the Extraordinary General meeting shall appoint a facilitator by show of voting paddles or ballot by simple majority vote. Only votes or eligible members attending are permitted.
* Where the Secretariat fails or omits to comply with such request to hold a meeting or Secretariat has resigned in block, then the member organisation who initiated the request in the first instance shall convene such an Extraordinary meeting at a date, time, and place stipulated by them and only on the original request and such notice shall state the business to be transacted and text of original request or proposal.
* A poll demanded regarding the election of a Facilitator for the meeting by any member shall be taken forthwith.
* All Extraordinary General Meetings shall be conducted under Standing Orders Procedures – in consultation with members.

## Secretariat

### Membership

* The Secretariat consists of nine (9) members. The nine (9) seats of the Secretariat will be allocated as follows:
* 3 Community pillar
* 3 Environment pillar
* 3 Social Inclusion pillar
* At each Annual General Meeting – one third (1/3) of members are required to step down. Length of service in their current term on the Secretariat determines who shall step down. The Longest Serving Members stepping down each year. Members having stepped down may offer themselves for re-election. If the Number is not three (3) or a multiple of three (3) then the number nearest one-third shall step down.
* A member may not serve on the Secretariat for more than six (6) consecutive years and having so served shall not be entitled to offer themselves for election for a further one (1) year. In total, a member shall not serve more than a total of nine (9) years.
* The quorum for Secretariat meetings shall be one third plus one (1).
* For membership of the Secretariat, an individual must be attached to and nominated by a PPN member organisation of a relevant electoral college. The Electorate for that position is comprised of the members of the Electoral College.
* A panel shall be compiled from the next highest candidates for the purpose of filling vacancies which may occur in the Secretariat in respect of that college between Annual General Meetings of the PPN.
* Any vacancy arising on the Secretariat between the annual electoral process shall be filled by the next highest candidate on the aforementioned panel willing to serve on the Secretariat.
* Secretariat Members shall attend the two (2) Plenary Sessions in the year.
* Any member elected to the Secretariat who fails to attend three (3) consecutive meetings of the Secretariat shall automatically remove themselves from that position and the vacancy arising shall be filled forthwith by the next available member on the panel as set out above.
* The Secretariat shall have authority to fill any temporary vacancy being 3 months or more arising from a member being absent on – Leave of Absence, Study Leave, Maternity Leave, etc.

### Responsibilities of the Secretariat

The Secretariat is the key day-to-day administrative body within the PPN Structure. It:

* Shall meet at least nine (9) times per annum – monthly – with no meetings in June, July and December.
* Ensures the proper functioning of the PPN between Plenary meetings, implementing decisions of the plenary.
* Manages the PPN budget including on-going financial matters and decisions.
* Manages the development and implementation of the PPN’s strategic plan.
* Establishes sub-groups to address in detail certain defined matters that arise from time to time.
* Cooperates with the relevant national PPN structures established for Monitoring and Evaluation of PPN’s recommendations or guidelines issued by such groups.
* Agrees an annual work plan with the local authority.
* Engages with the Dublin City Council regarding the Council’s oversight responsibility.
* Appoints a Facilitator of Secretariat Meetings with a term of 6 months (i.e. Plenary to Plenary). The position of Facilitator should rotate to ensure Secretariat members acquire relevant experience of this function. The Facilitator’s successor should be selected prior to the Plenary meeting at which the facilitator steps down.
* Manages the work of the Resource Worker, who acts as the secretary of the Secretariat, and who maintains the minutes, correspondence regarding all Secretariat meetings and Plenaries.
* Appoints a member to monitor the management of the Resource Worker.
* Reviews and approves the minutes of each previous meeting as the first item of the agenda of each Secretariat meeting.
* Administers the PPN in accordance with best practice and to the highest possible standard (to be agreed between the members, and if necessary approved by the Plenary) as outlined in the PPN Guidelines and the Charities Governance Code.

### Secretariat Subgroups

* Subgroups of the Secretariat may be established at a Secretariat meeting for a specific project or purpose.
* A minimum of 3 Secretariat members are required to sit on a subgroup, with at least one member of each gender represented.
* The subgroup must submit a written report at each Secretariat meeting.
* The term of a subgroup is from the Secretariat meeting where it is established to the next scheduled Secretariat meeting. The Secretariat may decide to extend the subgroups term until the next Secretariat meeting. This request must be included in the aforementioned written report.
* The Secretariat will set the terms of reference of the Subgroup at the time of establishment. This will be agreed and included in the minutes. The terms of reference of the subgroup will state the membership, purpose and the decision-making capacity of the subgroup in carrying out its work.
* The Secretariat may decide to invite non-Secretariat members to sit on a subgroup if they feel the addition would be appropriate. Any non-Secretariat members invited to sit on the subgroup must be in addition to the minimum of 3 Secretariat members.
* A short report on the activity of any Secretariat subgroups will be included in the PPN Activity Report published at each Plenary meeting.
* The quorum for a meeting is 2 members of the subgroup.
* The subgroup may meet virtually as well as physically.

### Role of the Secretariat facilitator

As Facilitator of the Secretariat, the Facilitator shall:

* Agree the framework with the resource worker for Secretariat meetings (e.g. timeframe, location, facilities etc.).
* Agree the agenda of each Secretariat meeting.
* Manage the progression of agenda items of each Secretariat meeting in terms of the items under discussion, the reaching of decisions and the time allocated.
* Review, agree and ensure the distribution in a timely fashion draft minutes in conjunction with the resource worker.
* Ensure that approved minutes are available.
* Normally act as the primary representative of the PPN network to external bodies or in emergency situations. This role may be delegated in given circumstances.
* Sign off on official PPN correspondence.
* Facilitate the Plenary meeting that takes at the end of their term.

If the Secretariat is dissatisfied with the conduct or performance of the facilitator, the facilitator may be voted out of that role during the course of a scheduled Secretariat meeting, by notification in writing prior to such meeting.

### Emergency and other meetings of the Secretariat

Emergency meetings of the Secretariat shall be held where not less than five (5) members of the Secretariat sign a request that the Secretariat be convened setting out clearly the reasons for such a meeting. Such a request shall be sent to the Facilitator responsible for the operation of Secretariat. On receipt of such request the Facilitator shall immediately arrange for the holding of the meeting within seven (7) days of the date of such receipt.

Other meetings of the Secretariat shall be held where the Facilitator is of the opinion that a situation has arisen for the holding of such a meeting.

# Linkage Groups

Linkage Groups bring together stakeholder organisations and groups who are members of the PPN with a common interest to discuss their diverse views and interests in a specific policy area. Linkage Groups may also be referred to as Thematic Networks. This is a pathway for such organisations and groups to have a real input into policy in their respective area of operation. Linkage Groups are an essential component of the work of the PPN.

Linkage Groups operate under the auspices of the PPN Plenary, and report to the PPN Secretariat. The Linkage Groups are governed by a term of reference (separate to this constitution).

## Principles governing Linkage Groups

Linkage Groups are:

* + Organised to advocate on behalf of the PPN on specific themes;
  + Open to membership from all PPN member organisations;
  + Based on a specific theme or themes;
  + Transparent in their operations and free from conflicts of interest;
  + Required to report regularly to the Secretariat and Plenary; and
  + Facilitated independently by an appointed facilitator from the membership of the Linkage Group who is not an elected PPN Representative on an external committee.

# Representation

All Community and Voluntary Sector Representatives on Decision and Policy Making Bodies of external agencies must come through the PPN Electoral Process.

As per guidelines from the Department of Rural and Community Development, the PPN is the “go to body for all Bodies who wish to benefit from the Community and Voluntary Sector experience and expertise”. The PPN shall actively seek compliance on this with relevant agencies and bodies.

A PPN Representative is any member of the PPN elected to office on behalf of the PPN, including but not limited to: the Secretariat, a Representative to an external Committee, a Linkage Group Facilitator and any other PPN Representative role.

## Principles governing PPN Representation

* All PPN Representatives on Boards or Committees of Policy Making and Advisory Bodies of and for Dublin City Council shall report to and take direction from their respective Linkage Group or where a relevant Linkage Group does not exist, from the Plenary or the Secretariat on behalf of the Plenary.
* All contributions and views expressed by PPN Representatives shall be in line with the guidance or mandate from the Linkage Group or Plenary.
* A member shall only represent the PPN on one (1) Board or Committee not including the Secretariat.
* A representative is elected for a fixed term of three (3) years to represent the issues of PPN members on a Board or Committee.
* It is the duty of a PPN Representative to uphold this constitution and abide by the PPN Representatives Charter.

## Vacancies

In the event of a PPN vacancy occurring,an election shall be called by the Secretariat if no panel to fill vacancies exists. This shall be done in line with the PPN’s election process.

## Deselection of Representatives

In the event of a representative selected to represent the PPN fails to carry out their duties in an appropriate manner, as outlined in this Constitution or the PPN Representatives Charter, the PPN may deselect the representative in the following manner:

1. A proposal to deselect a representative may be made by:
   1. the Secretariat of the PPN or
   2. a simple majority of delegates at a Plenary meeting of the PPN.
2. The proposal to deselect will be placed on the agenda for the next Plenary meeting of the PPN, and the representative concerned will be notified of the intention to raise the matter at least one month before the meeting at which the deselection is to be considered.
3. The representative will be given an opportunity to address the issue at the PPN plenary meeting.
4. The expulsion will be effective if passed by a two-thirds majority of the members present at the Plenary meeting.

# Code of Conduct

All stakeholders directly involved in the PPN shall always conduct themselves in a professional manner and in accordance with the provisions of this constitution and the Code of Conduct adopted thereunder.

The Code of Conduct shall be signed by every Member of the PPN elected to a representative position on the various committees and boards where the PPN has such representation and by the members of the Secretariat and by every member who acts as a Facilitator.

# Financial Matters

## Financial Records

Financial Records shall comply with accounting standards and processes and the directions of funders. A copy of the Financial Statement approved by Secretariat shall be circulated to all members prior to the relevant Plenary meeting.

## PPN Representative Expenses

Expenses of PPN Representatives in the carrying out of their duties are covered as laid out in the PPN Expenses policy and directed by the Government department responsible for PPNs.

# Amendments to the Constitution

A proposal to amend the Constitution may be made:

1. By the Secretariat.
2. By not less than 30 active members within 10 days of the date the Plenary.

The proposal shall be circulated to the membership and placed on the Agenda for the next Annual General Meeting or an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Plenary convened for that purpose.

The amendment shall be effective forthwith if passed by simple majority of those present at the Annual General Meeting or Extraordinary General Meeting.