

# **DUBLIN CITY PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORK (PPN)**

## **HOUSING LINKAGE GROUP**

### **POSITION PAPER**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Public Participation Networks (PPNs) were established in all local authority areas following the enactment of the Local Government Reform Act 2014. Their main role is to facilitate participation and representation of communities in a fair, equitable and transparent manner, through the environmental, social inclusion and community and voluntary sectors on local structures such as Strategic Policy Committees, Joint Policing Committees, Local Community Development Committees, Local Sports Partnerships. In addition to their primary focus around the participation and representation of community groups and organisations on these structures, PPNs also play an important role around the areas of training and capacity building for local groups and of networking and information sharing (around issues of interest to PPN member groups and organisations). At the national level there are approximately 20,000 groups affiliated to PPNs – within Dublin City PPN there are over 800 member groups from across Dublin City.

There are a number of different aspects to the ways in which PPNs are organised and structured. The ultimate decision making forum is the PPN Plenary which is the full membership of the PPN (i.e. over 800 groups in Dublin City PPN). This Plenary meets twice a year and is also empowered to make major decisions between Plenary meetings. The PPN Secretariat is selected by the PPN member groups to look after their affairs on an ongoing basis and to manage the paid PPN workers. In relation to PPN workers each PPN normally employs two workers - a Co-ordinator and an Administrator. These workers are employed by a PPN host organisation which is either a local authority, a PPN member group/organisation or an independent PPN company. Dublin City PPN is hosted by Dublin City Volunteer Centre. PPNs are funded through a combination of the Department Of Community and Rural Development (DRCD) which allocated €87,500 in 2023 to each PPN and local authorities which contribute €30,000 each year to PPNs in their local authority area.

PPN Linkage Groups are also an important aspect within the overall PPN process. These Linkage Groups are the main point of contact and connectedness between the member

groups of PPNs and the PPN Representatives who sit on structures such as Strategic Policy Committees, Joint Policing Committees and Local Community Development Committees. In many cases, Linkage Groups are aligned with the Strategic Policy Committees in each local authority area - for example if there was an Environmental SPC and a Housing SPC, there would generally also be a PPN Environmental Linkage Group and a PPN Housing Linkage Group. It is the intention of Dublin City PPN that the PPN Linkage Groups in Dublin City will be strengthened and will grow in both members and influence in 2023 and 2024. The purpose of this Position Paper is to set out ways in which the Housing Linkage Group might be strengthened over the next period of time. The Position Paper is based on discussions which have taken place with people involved in Dublin City PPN and on an analysis of the ways in which PPN Linkage Groups have evolved and developed within other PPN areas across Ireland.

## **2. PPN LINKAGE GROUPS**

A Linkage Group for an external committee (e.g. Strategic Policy Committee, Joint Policing Committee) is a collection of PPN member groups/organisations who have a particular interest or expertise in the issues being discussed by these committees. They ensure that all PPN members play a direct role in choosing their Representatives on Council committees, participate in influencing policies that affect them, and are kept up-to-date with developments. Linkage Groups are open to all PPN member groups/organisations regardless of which Pillar, Municipal District or Sector they belong to. There are three Pillars or Colleges to which PPN member groups can be affiliated – Community and Voluntary Pillar, Social Inclusion Pillar or Environmental Pillar.

Dublin City PPN Linkage Groups are established by the PPN Secretariat following a formal request from Dublin City Council, or other agreed external body, to the Secretariat seeking PPN representation on a specific committee(s) and the numbers of representatives required, including any specific criteria attached. The Linkage Group will elect the representative(s) from within its membership. Linkage Groups operate under the auspices of the PPN Plenary and report to the PPN via the Secretariat. New Linkage Groups may be established by the Secretariat on an issue basis or as requested. A Linkage Group lasts the lifetime of the committee it is aligned to (e.g. when the SPC Scheme closes at the end of each 5 year local authority period, the Linkage Group closes) and a Linkage Group is formed to feed into a specific public consultation will close when this consultation process is finished.

In relation to the roles and operations of PPN Linkage Groups the following points are also considered to be of relevance:

- Linkage Group members discuss and debate matters being addressed by the external committee (e.g. SPC, JPC) in order to inform the PPN Representatives on these committees and, when appropriate, to prioritise and develop policy positions
- Each Linkage Group has a facilitator who is selected from its membership to facilitate meetings, communications and the general work of the Linkage Group
- PPN Representatives on Dublin City Council committees and other external committees will communicate regularly with their Linkage Group to ensure that they are bringing agreed and relevant issues to the committee on which they sit as a representative of Dublin City PPN
- Where there is an issue of relevance to another Linkage Group, a joint meeting of Linkage Groups may be called
- The primary focus in Linkage Group meetings is the agenda of upcoming SPC/JPC/other committee meetings or other topics of relevance to the priorities of the committee - including issues to be raised directly by PPN member groups and PPN Representatives on these committees
- Meetings will be at a time and place that suits most members – remotely, in person or a combination of both
- Dublin City PPN staff provide administrative support to the Linkage Groups
- More than one person can represent a PPN member group/organisation on Linkage Groups

### **3. HOUSING LINKAGE GROUP OF DUBLIN CITY PPN**

There are seven Strategic Policy Committees (SPC) in Dublin City Council. These are as follows:

- Arts, Culture, Leisure and Recreation
- Climate Change, Environment and Energy
- Economic Development and Enterprise
- Finance
- Housing
- Planning and Urban Form
- Traffic and Transport

There are 23 members on the Housing SPC - 15 Councillors and 8 other sectoral interest members (which include three representatives from Dublin City PPN). The main task of the PPN Housing Linkage Group is to inform and influence the work and the outcomes which emerge from the activities of the Housing SPC. It is the main mechanism for the 800+ PPN member groups in Dublin City to bring their issues and concerns to the attention of Councillors and senior managers within DCC in relation to housing matters within Dublin City. Through this process it is intended that the community/voluntary sector and environmental sector will be able to have more influence and have a conduit for bringing their concerns and their projects/initiatives to the attention of key decision makers in DCC. The Linkage Group is also the main vehicle for selecting PPN Representatives to join the Housing SPC of DCC.

The main areas of responsibility and interest for the Housing SPC, and subsequently for the PPN Housing Linkage Group, are as follows:

• Housing Supply	• Housing Construction and Refurbishment Programmes
• Social Housing	• Affordable and Cost Rental Housing
• Models of Housing Delivery	• Housing Standards and Building Controls
• Homelessness Strategies and Programmes	• Traveller Accommodation
• Estate Management	• Universal Design
• Tenant Participation and Residents Support	

Any PPN member group which has an interest and/or involvement in these issues should give some consideration to joining the PPN Housing Linkage Group. Through this process they have the potential of elevating their work to key decision making and policy development structures within DCC and of contributing to the future development of Dublin City. In more particular terms, for example, the PPN Housing Linkage Group could play an important role in helping to identify ways in which the supply of housing within Dublin City could be increased with a particular focus on the provision of social and affordable/cost-rental housing. Through the PPN Housing Linkage Group, the 800 member groups of Dublin City PPN could also put forward ideas and suggestions about alleviating the homelessness crisis, about getting the right balance between build-to-buy and build-to-rent housing, about strategies to engage

more effectively with local residents and about the best ways to proceed with Regeneration Programmes taking place in Dublin City.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

PPNs have the potential to make a very significant contribution to the democratic process in Ireland. At the national level there are over 20,000 groups affiliated to the 31 PPNs across Ireland and PPNs are the main mechanism through which the community and voluntary, social inclusion and environmental sectors are represented on key local authority committees and on committees set up by other organisations. To be truly effective, PPNs also need to have strong Linkage Groups since it is through these Linkage Groups that the member groups of PPN can inform and alert PPN Representatives on structures such as SPCs about the issues and concerns that they would like raised and considered at meetings of these structures.

It is a key objective of Dublin City PPN in 2023 and 2024 to strengthen the PPN Linkage Groups within Dublin City. This would involve increasing the membership of the Linkage Groups, giving them clear focuses for their work and activities and making sure that meetings of the Linkage Groups can be as interesting and relevant as possible. It is also really important that members of the Linkage Groups can clearly see the benefits and outcomes of their work. In particular this has to involve noticeable achievements and successes for the Linkage Groups in bringing about positive and practical changes within the work, operations and priorities of Dublin City Council. If this does happen, it would represent a very significant outcome for participative democracy in that it will demonstrate the roles that local community based groups can play in effecting real and meaningful change at the urban, city wide level.

It is hoped that the strengthening of the Housing Linkage Group will result in PPN member groups being able to exert more influence around matters such as increasing the supply of housing in Dublin City, supporting new strategies to tackle the housing and homelessness crisis and helping to ensure that more social and affordable housing is prioritised within housing projects in Dublin City.

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