

POSITION PAPER ON DEVELOPMENT OF LINKAGE GROUPS WITHIN DUBLIN CITY PPN

1. INTRODUCTION

Linkage Groups are an important and essential component within the Public Participation Network (PPN) participatory democracy process. It is through the PPN Linkage Groups that individuals are nominated to join local authority structures such as Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs). The Linkage Groups are also the mechanism whereby PPN Representatives on bodies such as SPCs receive guidance, advice and instructions as to the issues to be raised at SPC meetings on behalf of the broader membership of the PPN (in Dublin City PPN, there are over 800 member groups). Apart from this nominating and representative role, Linkage Groups are also a mechanism through which PPN member groups can lobby and advocate round matters which are of interest and/or concern to local communities in Dublin City.

From June 2023 to December 2023, Stephen Rourke was contracted by Dublin City PPN to support the development of three Linkage Groups in Dublin City - the Housing Linkage Group, the Environmental Linkage Group and the Planning and Urban Form Linkage Group. This developmental work involved promoting the work and activities of the Linkage Groups, encouraging groups to attend the meetings of the Linkage Groups and facilitating meetings of the Linkage Groups. Different strategies were put in place to try and encourage more interest in the work of PPN Linkage Groups. In reviewing the work with Linkage Groups that took place in the second half of 2023, this paper will initially describe the work which took place over this six month period. It will then set out recommendations concerning the future development of Linkage Groups within Dublin City PPN. Finally this Position Paper will make a number of concluding comments and observations about the roles and functions of PPN Linkage Groups.

2. WORK WITH PPN LINKAGE GROUPS IN DUBLIN CITY, JUNE 2023 – DECEMBER 2023

Linkage Groups established by Dublin City PPN correspond closely to the Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) of Dublin City Council. This is in order to create a vehicle through which the member groups of Dublin City PPN can influence and impact upon the issues and matters being addressed at SPC meetings and to bring about policy and programme changes which

will enhance local communities in Dublin City. There are currently seven SPCs within Dublin City Council: Art, Culture, Leisure and Recreation; Climate Change, Environment and Energy; Economic Development and Enterprise; Finance; Housing; Planning and Urban Form; Traffic and Transport. At present, there are four PPN Linkage Groups to correspond with four of these SPCs. These are the Environmental Linkage Group, the Housing Linkage Group, the Planning and Urban Form Linkage Group and the Traffic and Transport Linkage Group.

Stephen Rourke worked on the development of the first three of these Linkage Groups in the second half of 2023. This involved organising 1-to-1 meetings with the key individuals involved in the Linkage Groups (including PPN Representatives on relevant SPCs); contacting those PPN member groups who may have a particular interest in the work and activities of individual Linkage Groups; producing Position Papers for each of the three Linkage Groups being facilitated and supported by Stephen Rourke; and organising Linkage Group meetings. A total of seven of these Linkage Group meetings took place between July 2023 and December 2023: four meetings of the Environmental Linkage Group (on 15th September, 28th October, 27th November and 11th December), two meetings of the Planning and Urban Form Linkage Group (on 20th July and 29th of November) and one meeting of the Housing Linkage Group (on 20th November).

The Linkage Group meetings were organised in different ways. Some were in-person whilst others took place remotely. Some only involved discussions about future focuses of Linkage Group meetings and about how to attract as many PPN member groups as possible to attend these meetings whilst others were preceded by practical workshop activities. Three of the four Environmental Linkage Group meetings had a two hour practical workshop on gardening and horticulture prior to the facilitated meeting taking place. Attendance at the 7 Linkage Group meetings varied from four people to eight people. Although the numbers in attendance were disappointing, the quality of discussion and interaction was very good with good ideas and suggestions for future action emerging from all seven Linkage Group meetings.

3. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF DUBLIN CITY PPN LINKAGE GROUPS

The ideas and recommendations which came out of the Linkage Group meetings in 2023 will help to form a strong basis for the ongoing development and growth of Dublin City PPN Linkage Groups in 2024 and in subsequent years. This section of the Position Paper will initially

focus on each of the three Linkage Groups and their development into the future. It will then make a number of short recommendations which apply to all Dublin City PPN Linkage Groups

(i) Environmental Linkage Group

- Main focuses (which correspond to key areas of responsibility and interest for the Climate Change, Environment and Energy SPC of DCC)

• Waste Management	• Street Cleaning
• Litter Control	• Tidy Villages/Towns
• Sustainable Energy Initiatives	• Postering Protocols for Dublin City
• Climate Change Strategies	• Dublin Waste to Energy Project
• Flood Relief	• Environmental Impact Studies
• Recycling Strategies	• Sustainable Development Goals

- Organisation of future meetings.

Invitations should be sent to all member groups of Dublin City PPN (approximately 800 groups) to attend future meetings of the Environmental Linkage Group since the state of the environment within local communities affects all people living in Dublin City. Meetings should take place every 2-3 months and be organised in such a manner that they occur close to the time of the relevant SPC meetings and can consider matters to be discussed at these SPC meetings. There is a preference for in-person meetings to take place at different locations across Dublin City although the option of remote/Zoom meetings should still be a possibility. The Environmental Linkage Group should be a citywide group (rather than being split into electoral areas) since environmental concerns cut across all communities within Dublin City.

- Projects and actions to be progressed in 2024 and future years
 - Community gardens and allotments have been successful in a number of locations in Dublin City and these should be expanded and extended to other communities in Dublin City. There were also references at the Linkage Group meetings to the ongoing development of pocket parks at appropriate locations in Dublin City
 - The Linkage Group and Dublin City PPN should promote and encourage a sustainable refreshments policy. This would involve cutting down on plastic and cardboard for refreshments at PPN and other community events, better use of sustainable keep cups and using caterers who utilise sustainability as part of their catering work

- The promotion of Tidy Towns across Dublin City. Whilst Tidy Towns are often associated with rural villages and towns there are still very effective Tidy Town groups in Dublin City (e.g. in Finglas and in Phibsborough). The Linkage Group should encourage more communities to get involved in Tidy Towns
- Waste, litter and the accumulation of rubbish is a huge issue in many communities across Dublin City. Issues such as the collection of large products (e.g. furniture, white electrical goods) and the availability and types of public litter bins needs to be looked at by the Environmental Linkage Group

(ii) Planning and Urban Form Linkage Group

- Main focuses (which correspond to key areas of responsibility and interest for the Planning and Urban Form SPC of DCC)

• Heritage	• Property Management
• Building Controls	• Regional Planning Guidelines
• Planning Services	• Urban Renewal
• Conservation	• Archaeology
• Active Land Management	

- Organisation of future meetings

Invitations should be sent to those member groups of Dublin City PPN who have a particular interest around issues concerning planning, physical developments, land use and regeneration within their areas. Meetings should take place every 2-3 months and be organised in such a manner that they occur close to the time of the relevant SPC meetings and can consider matters to be discussed at SPC meetings. There is a preference for most Linkage Group meetings to be online meetings which can make meetings more accessible for people with disabilities and with mobility issues. Some consideration might be given to organising Area Linkage Group meetings which would mirror the five administrative areas of DCC. People might be more interested in attending meetings which focus on their particular part of Dublin City. With an overall Dublin City population of 592,713 (2022 Census), there are over 100,000 people within each of the five DCC administrative areas. This is larger than the entire population of 10 counties in the Republic of Ireland and is perhaps a reason to look at Dublin City from the perspective of smaller population units rather than the overall population of Dublin City

- Projects and actions to be progressed in 2024 and future years
 - All efforts should be made to ensure that Dublin City is accessible as possible for people with disabilities. In considering new plans for Dublin City, issues around accessibility and universal design should be of central importance and care must be taken to ensure that streets and footpaths are not cluttered with street furniture which make them difficult to traverse for people with disabilities
 - The Planning and Urban Form Linkage Group should endeavour to work towards a situation where there is the right balance between new buildings and new green/open spaces. There is concern that there is insufficient green spaces and parks in Dublin City and this is particularly evident in areas such as Dublin 8
 - There is significant potential in bringing vacant shop and office units back into operational use. Right across Dublin City there are hundreds of empty units, many of which are located on well known, popular streets. More work could take place in converting these for active use purposes (e.g. housing, community services, enterprise/employment hubs)
 - There is a particular need to ensure that there are sufficient community facilities and sporting facilities to cater for the ever growing population of Dublin City (which has grown from 506,211 people to 592,713 people between 2006 and 2022). The focus on new apartments, hotels and student accommodation has to be matched by an equal focus on community/sporting facilities within which various activities and programmes can take place

(iii) Housing Linkage Group

- Main focuses (which correspond to key areas of responsibility and interest for the Housing SPC of DCC)

• 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

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenant Participation and Residents Support | |
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- Organisation of future meetings

Invitations should initially be sent to PPN member groups who have a particular interest in issues relating to housing, homelessness and urban regeneration. It is estimated that approximately 20 member groups are involved in housing and regeneration related activities. However, invitations to Linkage Group meetings should also be extended to groups who are being impacted by the current housing and homelessness crisis - these include migrant support groups, Traveller groups, groups working with victims of domestic violence. Meetings should take place every 2-3 months and be organised in such a manner that they occur close to the time of the relevant SPC meetings and can consider matters to be discussed at Housing SPC meetings. There is a preference for meetings to be in-person meetings although it is also recognised that some people would also prefer if the remote/online option was also available. Suggestions about invited speakers for future Housing Linkage Group meetings include David Dinnigan (Director of Housing Delivery with Dublin City Council) and Bob Jordan (CEO of the Housing Agency)

- Projects and actions to be progressed in 2024 and future years
 - There needs to be a more equal distribution of services for homeless people and for asylum seekers across Dublin City. At present it is estimated that over 50% of these services and bed spaces are within three postal districts in Dublin City - Dublin 1, Dublin 7, Dublin 8. Other parts of Dublin City should be used more for homelessness and asylum seeker services
 - There should be more of a concentration on rapid build, modular housing in relation to the urgent need to ramp up the supply of housing in Dublin City. Whilst it is recognised that DCC, together with the Department of Housing and Approved Housing Bodies, has increased housing supply in recent years, this could be accelerated more quickly through the use of modular housing processes.
 - PPN member groups can play an important role in informing plans and proposals for the refurbishment of flats complexes in Dublin City which were built by and are owned by DCC. A number of these are in a poor state of disrepair (mould, damp, bad

insulation) and require urgent refurbishment. The PPN Housing Linkage Group could play a useful role in helping to drive this refurbishment process

- There is a need to develop appropriate accommodation for migrants arriving in Ireland. Dublin City has the largest combination of Ukrainians and International Protection applicants living in Ireland. Many of these people are living in emergency accommodation in Dublin City and there is a clear need to identify more appropriate long term accommodation options

4. FINAL COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS

- There is a need to increase knowledge, awareness and understanding of PPNs amongst PPN member groups. There is significant potential within the PPN participatory democracy process in local groups influencing policy and bringing about positive change at the citywide level - through PPN Representatives on bodies such as SPCs, Joint Policing Committees and Local Community Development Committees. There is a view that the structures and operations of PPNs need to be simplified and made more easy to explain to member groups. When groups are more aware of the role and potential of PPNs they are more likely to get involved in Linkage Groups and other PPN structures
- Dublin City PPN should use some short case studies which demonstrate the roles which PPN Representatives can play in bringing about positive changes. Some people have the view that PPNs are no more than 'glorified talking shops' which do not really achieve any significant practical results. However, the experience of PPNs around the country (including Dublin City) is that PPNs (through PPN Representatives on SPCs and the work of Linkage Groups) can be an effective mechanism for positive change to take place - they can lobby and advocate on issues of interest and/or concern to local communities and residents. It is important to document the results and achievements of Dublin City PPN so people do realise that PPNs can achieve tangible and practical outcomes
- Training and capacity building for PPN member groups could be another way of getting more member groups involved in PPN Linkage Groups, PPN Secretariats and PPN Plenary meetings. It is through the training that people involved in PPN member groups will have a greater understanding and awareness of PPNs and participatory democracy. They will begin to appreciate the uniqueness of the Irish model of participatory democracy and the

ways in which representatives of local community groups can take on roles within important citywide structures such as SPCs. Particular references were made at Linkage Group meetings to the potential of training being provided in the areas of influencing change, advocacy and the use of Freedom of Information requests

- A key challenge for Dublin City PPN should be to increase the levels of participation in PPN Linkage Groups. These groups are the main ways in which community/voluntary groups, environmental groups and social inclusion groups can come together to advocate and campaign around issues which have the potential to make Dublin City a better place in which to live and work. In order for PPN Linkage Groups to grow and develop into the future they need to become more relevant for member groups so that people are prepared to give some time to attending Linkage Group meetings. Through a combination of relevant topics being discussed and interesting and thought provoking speakers Dublin City PPN should aim to have a minimum of 15-20 people attending Linkage Group meetings by the end of 2024
- Linkage Group meetings should be aligned to meetings of the SPCs to which they are most connected e.g. the Housing Linkage Group and the Housing SPC. This alignment should provide opportunities for members of the Linkage Groups to raise motions and to add agenda items to SPC meetings. This process will only work if the Linkage Group meetings take place close to the time of the meetings of the SPCs to which they are most connected. At these Linkage Group meetings, members can also inform and advise PPN Representatives on SPCs about the approach they should take in relation to agenda items being tabled for future SPC meetings
- Linkage Groups can be a very useful way of sharing good practice and interesting projects across the Dublin City area. People who attended the Linkage Group meetings in 2023 referenced really good and innovative work taking place in locations such as Finglas, Phibsborough, Coolock, Crumlin and The Liberties. The other people who attended the Linkage Group meetings had often not heard about this work taking place in other parts of Dublin City. Therefore, apart from their role in nominating people onto structures such as SPCs, Linkage Groups can also be an excellent mechanism for showcasing and promoting interesting projects and initiatives which have transferable potential to other parts of Dublin City

- With the local government elections taking place in June 2024, it is a very good year to strengthen and bolster the PPN Linkage Groups. Following these elections, SPCs will have to be re-established within each local authority area with a SPC Scheme being produced in each area - this SPC Scheme will detail the number of SPCs to be set up and the membership of these SPCs. In relation to PPN Representatives on the SPCs, the PPN Linkage Groups will need to nominate PPN Representatives to join the individual SPCs. In this context it would be a very positive development if, by June-July 2024, the PPN Linkage Groups were in a strong position to nominate up to 20 PPN Representatives on to SPCs of Dublin City Council
- It is recognised that there are difficulties in attracting new people, and especially younger people, to engage in voluntary, community work. There is a view that these difficulties have increased as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and that there are simply not the same number of people getting involved in local community activities as would have been the case before the emergence of Covid-19 in February 2020. Whilst there may be some disappointment at the number of people attending PPN events in Dublin City, this is not unusual in the current environment. The challenge for Dublin City and other community/voluntary sector groups is to make forums such as PPN Linkage Groups as interesting, attractive and relevant as possible so that people will decide to attend these events rather than doing other things with the time which they have at their disposal

STEPHEN ROURKE

INDEPENDENT FACILITATOR

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