

***Local Government-Shaping the Future of Our
Communities***

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Local Government Reform Act 2014

- Ireland transitions to reformed local government systems
- Citizen focused, building democracy, participation, engagement
- Local Government as leader of change in local economic, social and cultural affairs
- Enhanced role for the elected members
- Possible migration of public services to local government

Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government

Report Published 28 February 2014

Working Group Background

- The Working Group on Citizen Engagement was set up in September 2013 under the chairmanship of Fr. Sean Healy
- Role - make recommendations on more extensive and diverse input by citizens into decision making at local government level
- One for every county in the audience

Community Engagement

- Three Pillars
 - Councillors
 - Executive
 - Public

Working Group Recommendations

- Mechanism to enable the community and voluntary and environmental sectors to take an active formal role in the policy making and oversight activities of the Local Authority.
- “The relationship with local community groups” and “the role of... community organisations hav(ing) a distinct relevance for the community leadership role of local government”, particularly as such groupings include many of those citizens most active in, and committed to, their localities.
- The development of strengthened relationships between local community groups, local development bodies and local authorities would be mutually beneficial..”

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government,
February 2014

Legislative under-pinning

- 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”
- Working Group Report Recommends:
Public Participation Network Structures

Sustainable economic, environmental, social and community development locally

Vision:

A local government system, working in partnership with people and their communities, that is the primary vehicle of governance and public service at local level, which delivers efficient and good value services to the public and which is a significant leader of sustainable economic, environmental, social and community development locally.

Sustainability

Objective: provide structures and guidance that will help communities to share responsibility and work together with local government, the public and private sectors, environmental, community and voluntary organisations, and wider civil society to promote and protect the well-being of this and future generations

Fundamentals of public participation processes 1

1. The public participation process seeks out and facilitates the participation of those potentially affected by its decisions
2. Members of the public must be involved in deciding how they will participate
3. Multiple methods of participation should be made available and the appropriate methodology must be deployed for different situations
4. Methods for participation must be user-friendly and perceived as fair, just and respectful
5. The venues for public participation must be accessible to all

Fundamentals of public participation processes 2

6. The public participation process provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful and accessible manner
7. The public's role in decision-making and the limits of their influence is clear from the outset
8. It should be demonstrated that the public's contribution has the potential to meaningfully influence the decisions or outcomes
9. The public participation process communicates to the public how their input affected the decision or outcomes once the decisions are made
10. The public has the opportunity to be involved and/or monitor the implementation of the decision or outcomes

Public benefit civil society groupings

- Social inclusion organisations which represent the interests of groups affected by poverty, social exclusion and discrimination. This includes local communities in disadvantaged areas, groups suffering discrimination and/or social exclusion as a result of race, creed, ability, gender etc.
- Environmental organisations whose primary objectives and activities must be environmental (i.e. ecological) protection and/or environmental sustainability
- Other voluntary and community organisations

“The Public Participation Network (PPN)”

A new framework for public engagement and participation is being developed within each local authority area

This is made up of community, voluntary and environmental organisations within the Local Authority. These organisations work together on agreed objectives based on promoting the well-being of this and future generations

The PPN will be the main link through which the local authority connects with the community, voluntary and environmental sectors

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 participate in various processes of the County/City Councils and their Boards/Committees
- Representatives will be chosen by the PPN for committees of the local authorities where there is community representation required

The role of the Network 1

1. To develop for the County/City a vision for the well-being of this and future generations.
2. to facilitate opportunities for networking, communication and the sharing of information between environmental, community and voluntary groups.
3. to identify issues of collective concern and work to influence policy locally in relation to these issues.
4. to actively support inclusion of socially excluded groups, communities experiencing high levels of poverty, communities experiencing discrimination, including Travellers to enable them to participate at local and county level and to clearly demonstrate same.

The role of the Network 2

5. to encourage and enable public participation in local decision making and planning of services
6. to facilitate the election of participants from the environmental, social inclusion and voluntary sectors onto city/county decision making bodies.
7. to support a process that will feed the broad range of ideas, experience, suggestions and proposals of the Network into policies and plans being developed by agencies and decision makers in areas that are of interest and relevant to the Network

The role of the Network 3

8. to work to develop the Environmental, Community and Voluntary sectors so that the work of the sectors is clearly recognised and acknowledged and the sectors have a strong collective voice within the County/City.
9. to support the individual members of the Public Participation Network so that:
 - They can develop their capacity and do their work effectively.
 - They can participate effectively in the Public Participation Network activities.
 - They are included and their voices and concerns are heard.

Membership of the PPN

Member Organisations opt to be a part of one of three electoral colleges within the PPN:

- Environment
- Social Inclusion
- Voluntary

Each City/County PPN will have a Secretariat

- 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

Well-Being

A society's well-being requires that economic, political, environmental, cultural and social developments all be sustainable. It also requires a focus on inter-generational justice to ensure the well-being of future generations is promoted.

The PPN will set out what they consider necessary to promote well-being for present and future generations

Statement of Well-Being

- This statement of well-being will act as a guiding vision statement for everything done by the group that drew up the statement e.g. choosing representatives, taking positions on issues, developing activities of any kind etc.
- Well-being statements should be reviewed bi-annually

Participation

The expectation of the PPN representatives from the Local Authority is that Local Authorities will recognise their right and responsibilities in these areas. For genuine participation of the public, user-friendly and easily accessible structures and processes are required

Supports 1

Local Authorities to agree and adopt a Protocol for all committees/decision making committees with PPN representatives which will enable the representatives to engage appropriately

Local Authorities to set aside resources for participation on key decision making committees to cover travel and other expenses for PPN representatives

Local Authorities to provide funding for one whole time equivalent staff member for the Network

Supports 2

- Provision of programme funding for all **Networks** which would allow them to
 - Roll out their annual programme of activity
 - Provide training supports for public Participants / Representatives
- In particular, care should be taken to resource those who are most vulnerable and/or whose voices are least heard