



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Corporate Policy Groups and Strategic Policy Committees

Revised Guidelines for Establishment and Operation

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CPG & SPC Guidelines for Establishment and Operation

The following are guidelines from the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage under:

- Section 133(10) of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended by section 48 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, in relation to Corporate Policy Groups (CPGs)
- Section 54(2) of the Local Government Act 2001 in relation to Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs).

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

On foot of a commitment in the **Programme for Government – Our Shared Future** to mandate the establishment of a climate action SPC in each local authority, it was decided that it would be opportune to hold a general review of local authority SPCs. Previously, guidance had last been issued in respect of the establishment of SPCs and CPGs in 2014. A Stakeholder Working Group (SWG) was put in place to oversee, steer and guide the review; the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) was commissioned by the Department to carry out the review itself. Following research, consultation with stakeholders, and ongoing engagement with the SWG, the IPA submitted its final report on 8 March 2024. [Report on a review of local authority SPCs](#).

The report contained recommendations aimed mainly at clarifying the existing guidelines, and expanding the scope of the guidance provided in order to make local authorities more aware of the possibilities available to them. These were endorsed, with some additional suggestions, by the SWG in its commentary, which is available online. [Stakeholder Working Group's commentary](#).

The SPC and CPG guidelines have been adjusted to take into account a number of the recommendations of the report and of the SWG's commentary.

1.2 Corporate Policy Groups (CPGs)

The statutory basis for Corporate Policy Groups (CPGs) is set out in section 133 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended by section 48 of the 2014 Act.

This provides that the CPG may:

- (a) “advise and assist the elected council in the formulation, development, monitoring and review of policy for the local authority and for that purpose propose arrangements for the consideration of policy matters and the organisation of related business by the elected council”, and
- (b) “make proposals for the allocation of business as between strategic policy committees and for the general coordination of such businesses”.¹

The role of the CPG is strategic and it links and co-ordinates the work of the different SPCs.

Acting as a link between the SPCs and the full council, the CPG will have an active role in the preparation of the draft budget. It will determine whether a function will be discharged at the municipal district or authority level, where reference in relation to this question is made to it. It must also be consulted in the preparation of the corporate plan. The Chief Executive supports the work of the CPG.

The Cathaoirleach reports to the full Council on the work of the CPG, and should also report to the Council on the work (including proposals) of the SPCs on a quarterly basis (although this may be more frequent depending on circumstances). The Chairs of each SPC report back to their Committees similarly, as do the representatives of each municipal district to their fellow municipal district members. A summary of the central features of the SPC System is to be found at **Appendix 1**.

1.3 Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs)

The statutory basis for Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) is set out in section 48 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended by section 41 of the 2014 Act.

As per Section 48(1) of the 2001 Act, local authorities are required to establish “strategic policy committees 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 authority on those matters”.

¹ Section 133(2)(b) of the Local Government Act 2001 (as amended).

Each local authority has established SPCs which bring together both elected members, and people actively working with social, economic, cultural and environmental bodies to develop and review policies related to council services.

The SPCs thus provide elected members with external views as they discharge their strategic role in the development of the local authority, including their policy development and oversight roles within the local authority. The SPC system provides them with a better focus and enhanced capacity for involvement in policy formulation, review and evaluation, with inbuilt assistance of relevant sectoral interests and the support of a Director of Services.

SPCs prepare the groundwork for policies which are then decided on by the local authority, including as appropriate at municipal district level. Accordingly, local sectoral interests, including the trade union, farming, environmental and community/voluntary sectors, along with the business community, constitute one third of the membership of SPCs.

Section 48(1A) of the 2001 Act requires that at least one of the SPCs that is established shall be to consider matters which relate to the functions of the local authority in relation to economic development and enterprise support. Accordingly, each local authority shall form an SPC entitled the “SPC for Economic Development and Enterprise”.

The functions of this SPC are to include the preparation of the economic elements of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP), the implementation and review of the economic elements of the LECP and the oversight by the elected members of the operation of the Local Enterprise Office (LEO).

While the exact remit of SPCs varies from local authority to local authority, depending on the individual SPC scheme, generally speaking, most local authorities have established either four or five SPCs, reflecting the main local authority programmes such as housing, planning and environment.

1.4 Application of these Guidelines

The objective of these guidelines is to create a common general framework for the establishment and operation of CPGs and SPCs and to assist and support local

authorities in this task. However, subject to this general framework which aims to ensure a level of consistency across the 31 local authorities, the guidelines allow a measure of discretion to individual local authorities in establishing an SPC structure which takes account of local circumstances and which best meets local needs.

1.5 Definitions

SPCs assist the council in the formulation, development, monitoring and review of policy. This means that SPCs should be involved at the earliest stages in the policy making cycle, from the initiation and development of policies to address local challenges or opportunities, to the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of those policies.

For the purposes of these guidelines, **policy formulation** can be seen as the process by which policy alternatives to address particular local challenges or opportunities are identified and narrowed down.

Policy development can be the process by which a particular policy is to be most effectively implemented: by whom, using what financial and other resources, within what timeframe, with what measurable anticipated outcomes or results, etc.

The **monitoring and review of policy** occur during and after a policy is implemented to evaluate whether the policy objectives are being achieved and the outcome of the policy approach taken.

There are many possible definitions for this terminology and these clarifications are not definitive nor intended to restrict the scope of SPCs' work. Instead, they should be understood as guidance to aid both SPC members and officials.

2 Corporate Policy Group

2.1 CPG - Structure

The membership of the CPG comprises the:

- Cathaoirleach;
- chairpersons of each SPC; and
- where the municipal district is not already represented, a member of such municipal district (as selected by the municipal district or failing selection, the Cathaoirleach of the municipal district or his or her nominee).

In Limerick City and County Council, following the enactment of the Local Government (Mayor of Limerick) and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2024:

- The Mayor is a member and chair of the CPG. (Therefore, in the case of Limerick City and County Council, in these guidelines, references to the Cathaoirleach in the context of the CPG, refer to the Mayor)
- The Príomh Comhairleoir is also a member of the CPG.

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.

The CPG is supported by the Chief Executive. (In Limerick City and County Council, the Director General will support the CPG. Therefore, in the case of Limerick City and County Council, in these guidelines, references to the Chief Executive, refer to the Director General).

2.2 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;
- 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, in particular through 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 particular 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 particular policy issues; where appropriate; and
- provide feedback to the SPCs on council policy and views in areas relevant to the SPCs.

In Limerick City and County Council, the CPG may also advise the Príomh Comhairleoir in the setting of the agenda for council meetings.

2.3 Minutes of CPG Meetings

The minutes of CPG meetings should be circulated to all members of the local authority as a matter of course.

3 Role of SPCs

3.1 SPCs and the Council

It is the task of the SPCs, as committees of the council, 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 the early stages, when policy options are more fluid. Therefore, if the SPC system operates satisfactorily, much of the preliminary and background work, discussion and recommendation should be completed at SPC level for final consideration and ratification by the council.

The success of the SPCs is crucially dependent on the active involvement of councillors and on a positive mindset from all involved – councillors, sectoral representatives, Chief Executives, directors and staff – that are focused on the strategic role of SPCs.

The work of the SPC chair and Director of Services is of critical importance.

3.2 SPC Work Programme

Each SPC should adopt a multi-annual work programme linked to the local authority's Corporate Plan which may be updated as necessary.

The CPG should approve the work programmes of the SPCs and may, as appropriate recommend issues to be considered by the SPCs. A review of SPC work programmes should be carried out by the CPG in the third year of the local authority electoral term.

SPC members should be fully involved in the process of preparing the SPC work programmes, which should begin once the policy parameters of each SPC having been drawn up, the SPC scheme having been agreed, and the SPCs' membership having been determined.

Once a suitable draft work programme for an SPC has been prepared, it should be circulated to the SPC's membership for their observations, comments, and feedback. At least four weeks should be allowed for SPC members to return responses on a draft work programme. Having considered any responses from SPC members, the work programme should be finalised and submitted to the CPG for approval.

3.3 A Strategic Role

SPCs have a major role in assisting and advising the council in relation to functions of a strategic statutory nature, i.e. policy to mirror the functions of a local authority, e.g. preparation of a development plan.

They also have a function in other, non-statutory policy fields, such as urban, village and rural renewal plans, policy related to the development of work programmes and the establishment of priorities for particular services; consideration of the needs of people with disabilities in the formulation and implementation of relevant policies; integration of sustainability principles to particular services, and in the strategic monitoring of local authority services.

The SPC for Economic Development and Enterprise also has specific functions in relation to economic development and support for enterprise.

3.4 SPC Chairs

The SPC chairs have a pivotal role in ensuring the success of CPGs and SPCs.

In that context, to facilitate the smooth and effective operation of the SPCs and the CPG, local authorities should ensure that SPC Chairs are selected on the basis that:

- they have an interest in the work of the SPCs,
- they are fully aware of the leadership role of SPC Chairs, and
- they appreciate the need to work with the relevant Director of Service.

SPC chairs are appointed by the full council for a minimum period of three years and the overall spread of SPC chairs must reflect the elected representational spread on the full council. They should also reflect the gender make-up of the council.

It is also important that the SPC chairs appointed by the full council should, as far as it is practical, be representative of each of the municipal districts in the local authority and, in local authorities without municipal districts, be representative of each of the area committees.

3.5 Advice and Information from Chief Executive

The Chief Executive is required to advise and assist the SPC generally as regards the exercise of the performance of the functions of the SPC, including when requested to do so by the SPC.

Normally, when specific advice might be seen to be beneficial to the SPC, the SPC chair should make arrangements with the Director of Services to have this advice available for the relevant meeting of the SPC. It would be open to the SPC itself to request specific advice in relation to the performance of its functions, which the Chief Executive/Director of Services would make available to the members of the SPC, where possible and appropriate, as soon as it is available and in advance of the next SPC meeting.

The SPC must have regard to the advice or assistance of the Chief Executive in the exercise of the performance of the functions of the SPC.

The SPC itself, or the SPC chair, may also request the Chief Executive to provide all information that may be in the possession of the local authority, or which the Chief Executive is in a position to procure, related to the business of the SPC. Normally, again, this will be agreed between the Director of Service and the SPC chair, with the possibility of the SPC itself requesting it. The information sought should be made available to the members of the SPC as soon as it is available, to assist in ensuring the effective and efficient transaction of the business of the SPC.

The legal bases for these provisions are sections 132 and 136 of the 2001 Act, as amended respectively by sections 47 and 51 of the 2014 Act.

3.6 Early Presentation of Policy Proposals to SPCs

SPCs need to be involved from the preliminary phases of preparation of a policy and to assist in the setting of overall parameters, identification of issues to be addressed and approaches to be taken etc. In this way, SPC members can have a meaningful involvement in presenting to the full council for decision the values and choices which are important elements of plan preparation.

The 2014 Act made provision for early presentation of proposals to the local authority connected with the formulation, development, monitoring and review of policy.

The first step in this is the presentation of these proposals to the SPC, and the Chief Executive is required to discuss, in outline form, or on the basis of very preliminary papers, the development or amendment of any policy, and how and when its implementation is to be monitored and reviewed. This will require discussion between the Chief Executive/ Director of Service and the chairperson of the SPC in advance of the preparation of any papers and the preparation and the presentation of the preliminary papers in the light of these discussions.

The SPC will then be in a position, during these early stages, to advise on the preparation of preliminary papers for consideration by the council.

3.7 Views of Elected Members Expressed at SPC

The Chief Executive is required to have regard to the views of the elected members in the discharge of the executive functions of the council, including as expressed at a meeting of an SPC. Normally, where the views expressed at the SPC meeting require the particular attention of the Chief Executive, the SPC chair will identify these for the Director of Service for onward transmission to the Chief Executive and other colleagues on the local authority staff, as appropriate.

Note that “having regard” to views expressed by the elected members requires the Chief Executive to take them into consideration, along with all the other matters that he or she is required by law to take into consideration and which for good governance, policy or other reasons he or she considers prudent to take into consideration.

The legal base for this requirement is section 147(7) of the 2001 Act, as inserted by section 54 of the 2014 Act.

3.8 Requirement to have Regard to the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy

There is a requirement on each SPC to have regard to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) prepared by the Regional Assembly.²

3.9 Assistance from Public Authorities

Section 48(3A) of the 2001 Act (inserted by section 41(d) of the 2014 Act) empowers a SPC to seek the attendance of public authorities at a meeting for the purpose of assisting it in developing policy.

A request to a public authority to attend a meeting of a 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 shorter interval if mutually agreed.

It is important to recognise that 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 provide an additional resource to the elected members in formulating policy and to

² As per section 48(3B) of the 2001 Act, as inserted by section 41 of the 2014 Act.

strengthen linkages between local authorities and public bodies with wider responsibilities in the sectoral area that the SPC operates. The invitation to attend at a meeting of an SPC cannot be used to query the public authority in the performance of its functions or duties.

Where a public authority indicates that it is unable to attend a meeting of a SPC, the SPC chair may report this fact to the local authority, providing the local authority with the public authority's reasons for not attending. There is no requirement to report non-attendance to the council, for instance where dialogue has established that the public authority cannot add value to the discussions of the SPC, or where there is agreement that attendance would be possible at a future date.

If non-attendance is reported to the council, the council has the possibility (not a requirement) to report the failure to the relevant Minister.

3.10 SPCs and Service Delivery Plans (SDPs)

The development of Service Delivery Plans (SDPs) will facilitate the identification of objectives and preparation of strategies for individual services.

SPCs can provide advice and assistance to the council in the preparation of individual SDPs and in setting out the related objectives, strategies, standards and performance indicators.

In this context too, particular policy issues can be identified for special consideration and in-depth examination by the SPC. Such SDPs could set out statements of overall policy, focus on best practice issues, identify particular issues to be addressed and approaches taken, review overall performance of programmes, set out the future strategic direction for the service, address value for money (VFM) issues, effectiveness and efficiency etc. Responsibility for staffing matters is not altered by these arrangements.

More generally, the work of SPCs would take account of the council's overall corporate policy and objectives, integrate with statutory plans where relevant, link realistically to financial resources and be responsive to sectoral consultations.

3.11 Consultation

In view of the important strategic role which SPCs have in the development and review of policy, consultation with relevant sectors and interests should be an on-going part of the SPC process. This may be of additional significance where an SPC covers a number of services with limited opportunity for direct **sectoral** participation on the committee, or where it was not possible to accommodate fully the range of relevant interests.

It is a matter for the SPC, taking account of the range of interests already represented, to decide on the appropriate consultative arrangements, subject to whatever guidelines might be issued by the council.

4 SPC Meetings

4.1 SPC Meetings – Procedures

The SPC chair and relevant Director of Service should meet well in advance of an SPC meeting to clarify the agenda for the forthcoming meeting and to agree on objectives and what they would like as expected outcomes.

Meeting at an early stage is very important and should take place at the start of the local authority term/beginning of each year, as appropriate.

In addition, the local authority should involve, as far as possible, all members of SPCs in drawing up the agenda, and they should return their views in a timely manner.

A calendar of SPC meetings should be agreed at the start of each year. Meetings of SPCs should generally be held a minimum of twice yearly at suitable times for all SPC members. However, each SPC may choose to meet with a greater frequency, depending on the demands of their work.

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. From this perspective, the timing and sequencing of meetings can be essential to strengthening the impact of SPCs' work.

SPC meetings should be conducted in a much less rigid and formal way than full council meetings in order to create an informal and collaborative atmosphere that would allow honest views and opinions on policy issues. To facilitate this, local authorities should 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**³, published by the Department of Rural and Community Development in 2023.

³ <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/bcc24-a-guide-for-inclusive-community-engagement-in-local-planning-and-decision-making/>

Each SPC meeting should include a reminder, at or near the beginning of the meeting as appropriate, of the ethical requirements placed on SPC members by section 177 of the Local Government Act 2001. When attendance is being noted at the start of the meeting, each of the SPC members should inform the meeting of any conflicts of interest arising from any agenda items. The local authority should consider whether to include this in its standing orders for SPC meetings.

The local authority should provide a key contact person (other than the Director of Service) for all SPC members and particularly for sectoral representatives to deal with SPC matters.

Local authorities should also consider the most appropriate locations for holding SPC meetings perhaps making greater use of community halls and centres, in order to facilitate attendance and enhance inclusivity. When preparing for a meeting and choosing a location, local authorities must ensure that appropriate accessibility arrangements are in place.

Local authorities should ensure that documentation concerning SPC meetings is sent well in advance of the meetings, ideally four weeks in advance.

The agenda and minutes of SPC meetings should also be circulated well in advance to all SPC members. In particular, the agenda should be circulated to all SPC members four weeks in advance of meetings. Minutes should include action points which assign responsibility to a specific party or parties in respect of each action.

4.2 SPC Meetings – Policy Support and Development

The importance of each SPCs having an agreed annual work programme is emphasised.

Having a work programme aids in clarity around the role of the SPC for members and gives a clear direction for their efforts; it also aids in ensuring accountability and transparency in goal-setting and progress achieved.

All SPC members should have the opportunity to contribute to the preparation of the work programme. Where reaching agreement is challenging, it is suggested that the

local authority make use of a facilitator. The work programme should be linked to the local authority's corporate plan.

In the light of discussions at paragraph 3.6 above, Directors of Service should undertake appropriate research on relevant policy options when SPC members are formulating policy. These options should be presented to the Chairs and members of SPCs in a clear, concise and brief manner.

Local Authorities should develop as practicably as possible the policy support role for SPCs. This could include making greater use of the research capacity within local authorities and also making greater use of external agencies such as the LGMA, third level institutions, NOAC, etc. Where expertise cannot be sourced from these bodies, local authorities could consider making funds available for hiring external research expertise.

SPCs may also invite policy experts to attend meetings as guest speakers in order to provide perspectives on specific matters on the meeting agenda. This is to support the SPCs in their policy role, and is not to be confused with the power of SPCs under section 48(3A) of the Local Government Act 2001 to invite public authorities to attend a meeting. Due to the need to avoid the risk of potential conflicts of interest, guest speakers should be considered subject to the relevant portions of the ethics framework.

Once the SPC members have analysed all the potential policy options and avenues open to them and have come to a consensus conclusion the policy can be drafted for presentation at the next SPC meeting.

In general guidelines coming from the central Government Departments may be interpreted as guidelines rather than as a prescriptive set of instructions, except in matters covered by a service level agreement, in order to allow local authorities flexibility in determining and implementing plans and programmes locally.

4.3 SPC Meetings - Training

Training programmes would be valuable for SPC members, and consideration of needs in this regard should be included in the Training and Development Programme for Councillors.

Effective meeting skills would be useful for SPC chairs and training on policy areas would be significant for all SPC members.

Policy development/research skills and facilitation skills would be valuable for Directors of Service and their support staff.

4.4 SPC Meetings - Linkages

SPC chairs should introduce SPC recommendations for full approval by the full council.

The SPCs sectoral representatives should provide feedback to their nominating organisations on the activities of the SPC.

Members of SPCs should be provided with automatic feedback on the outcome of the council's decisions on SPC recommendations.

4.5 Use of the Irish Language

Many councils already promote the use of the Irish language in various facets of their work. This practice could be extended to SPCs. Bain úsáid as an teanga atá againn - as an obair a thagann an fhoghlaim.

5 SPC Framework

5.1 Relevant Factors

The factors to be taken into account in determining the overall framework of SPCs for a particular local authority include:

- the total number of elected members on the council;
- the range of sectoral and other interests to be represented, including facilitating a reasonable spread of interests;
- the desirability of allowing adequate opportunity for participation by councillors and sectoral interests;
- the organisational arrangement of service groupings within the authority and the remit envisaged for each SPC;
- the need to ensure that the organisational and financial resources of the particular local authority are not over-stretched; and
- integration with other meeting requirements and committee structures and ensuring streamlined procedures generally.

Regard must also be had to the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), including its membership and remit.

5.2 Number of SPCs

The number of SPCs in a local authority should be determined having taken the above factors into account.

Where possible, taking account of resource implications, local authorities will normally have four SPCs, including the SPC for Economic Development and Enterprise. However, in the larger local authorities, individual local circumstances may warrant additional SPCs. It is accepted that it could be necessary for a Director of Services to serve two or more SPCs.

5.3 SPC Remit and Configuration

In light of the local authority's role across a range of public services delivered locally, SPCs should have a reasonably broad remit. While the remit will be anchored in the main local government services, it should not operate in a restrictive way but in the context of the wider local picture taking account of related public services and agencies and of local needs and of circumstances generally, **e.g. an environment SPC should have regard for transport issues and vice versa.**

In line with the requirements of section 48(1A) of the Local Government Act 2001, it is only the SPC for Economic Development and Enterprise that is mandatory.

In addition, each SPC is required to consider climate action and climate impacts as part of any and all policies that form part of its work programme. Again, deliberations in this regard should operate in a cross-cutting manner and in the broader public policy context; any interrelationships with other policy domains should be taken into account while considering policies. (Climate action should be considered in its widest sense, to include biodiversity action, water quality action, sustainable land use, energy (source and usage), resource management, sustainable transport/mobility, air quality/emissions, soil quality, waste management, community action, etc., and other related issues – reflecting the complex and integrated nature of climate action). This should not be read as precluding a local authority from establishing a specific Environment/Climate Action/Water Quality etc. SPC, if it deems it appropriate to do so.

Some local authorities have 'thematic' SPCs, which deal with issues that are thematically similar, e.g. 'Governance' and 'Placemaking' SPCs. Ultimately it is a matter for the local authority to determine which SPC arrangement best suits its particular needs, while taking into account the requirements of section 48(1A) of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended.

In devising their SPC arrangements, local authorities will also need to have regard to key corporate objectives identified as part of their SDPs process and reflected in their corporate plan, and, where necessary, to matching SPC structures and internal organisational arrangements in a way which supports the achievement of those objectives.

In some limited and exceptional instances a small number of specialist or ad hoc committees may be required either through particular local circumstance or through national policy. It is envisaged that local ad hoc committees would, by definition, have a limited lifespan. Similarly, it is expected that committees arising from national policy would occur only occasionally. Where such committees are, however, established, the local authorities may mirror the adopted SPC scheme in seeking representatives, if sectoral representation is deemed appropriate.

5.4 Area Committees

The SPC approach is designed to strengthen the policy development role of councillors, and to improve policy formulation generally. A clear focus on significant policy and strategic issues is fundamental to the SPC concept. At the same time, there is clear need for an area- or locality-based dimension to the delivery of services and for the purposes of local community and area development. This was underpinned by the establishment of municipal districts in 2014.

Area Committees in the functional areas of Dun Laoghaire Rathdown, Fingal, and South Dublin County Councils and Dublin, Cork and Galway City Councils, however, may continue to consider matters connected with the functions of the local authority referred to it by the local authority.

6 The SPC Scheme

6.1 Preparation of Draft SPC Scheme

The Chief Executive will, on the basis of these guidelines and in consultation with a representative group of councillors including the Cathaoirleach, the Chairs of the outgoing SPCs where they are still members of the Council, or in the absence of such Chairs, such representatives as are appointed by the Council, prepare a draft scheme for the implementation of the SPC system.

As part of the preparation of the draft scheme, the Council should obtain feedback from sectoral interests via the Public Participation Network (PPN). The out-going sectoral representatives of the SPCs could also provide a useful resource in this regard.

The draft should, in particular, include the proposed number, policy configuration and functions of the SPCs, the numbers on each Committee and an outline framework for sectoral representation on the SPCs.

The draft scheme should set out the relationship between the CPG and the local authority's SPCs, and detail how they interact.

The draft scheme should show how work flows between the SPCs and the plenary council, including the process for introducing recommendations and/or proposals from the SPCs to the plenary council; the draft scheme should describe how feedback will be provided to each SPC on its proposals and/or recommendations.

The draft scheme should also include proposals for the selection of sectoral representatives by the sectors themselves via the Public Participation Network (PPN) (see circular letter **CVSP 1/2014** of 10 April 2014).

The draft scheme should specify provisional assignment of sector(s) to each SPC and the number of representatives from each sector for each SPC. The public consultation process in the draft scheme will allow for organisations to comment on these proposals and to indicate their choice of sector and the SPC configurations. (See paragraphs 5.4 to 5.8).

Consideration should be given to including a commitment in the draft scheme to using a variety of venues for SPC meetings. Similarly, making allowance in the draft scheme for varying meeting times to facilitate members should be considered.

The draft scheme should include provision for payment of expenses by the local authority to any SPC members who do not receive expenses from their own organisation in respect of attendance at SPC meetings.

Local authorities may include in the draft scheme a commitment to have regard for the **Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making** (2023, Department of Rural and Community Development), in order to facilitate a collaborative and more inclusive process.

The draft scheme should set out the legal obligations of members in respect of the ethics and lobbying framework in its own section; the local authority could consider including a similar section in its SPC standing orders.

6.2 Sectoral Views

It is recommended that steps be taken to ensure that the views of the sectors as represented by the national pillars of key stakeholders (see **Appendix 2** for contact points), the PPN and other more local interests be sought with a view to ensuring that the SPCs are inclusive and effective. The aim of the PPN structures and processes is to facilitate and enable the public and the constituent organisations of the PPN to articulate a diverse range of views and interests within the local government system.

Approaches to stimulate greater citizen engagement should complement rather than diminish, compete with, or substitute for local representative democracy and the primary responsibility and accountability for decision-making within the local authority will remain with the elected council. However, decisions by local authorities will be informed and strengthened by more effective community/citizen engagement and increased public participation in local government.

Consideration should also be given to possible initiatives to promote greater participation in local government by groups such as young people, women and groups whose voices have not been well heard in the past.

Given this, the following factors, which are in no particular order of importance, must be considered in determining sectoral representation on and across each SPC.

- The need to foster economic and social development generally;
- A stated commitment to working towards gender balance and to encouraging as full as possible gender balance in representation from the sectors;
- the need to ensure a pro-active approach to having as many relevant sectors as possible across the SPC system;
- the need for balance between divergent interests;
- the need for a comprehensive audit of groups within the local authority area to facilitate the fullest possible consultation with each sector;
- the priority concerns of each sector and the appropriateness of the SPCs to these concerns;
- the relationship between the number of SPCs and the range of interests which can be represented;
- a commitment to the fostering of social inclusiveness and equality;
- a commitment to have a pro-active information strategy to inform the public on the renewal of local government;
- the desirability of facilitating relevant organisations to be part of the nominating constituencies.

6.3 SPC Configuration

At a minimum 6, and where appropriate, 7 sectors should be represented in each local authority's SPC configuration. These are:

- Agriculture/Farming (for Rural Authorities)

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

6.4 The Nomination Process

The nomination process for:

- the agricultural/farming sector will be facilitated by the farming and agricultural organisations pillar;
- the business/commercial and development/construction sectors will be facilitated by the business and employers organisations pillar;
- the trade union sector will be facilitated by the trade union pillar;
- the environmental/conservation, community / voluntary and social inclusion sectors will be determined on the basis of the local nomination process through the PPN (See paragraph 6.7 below);
- the environmental/conservation sector will be facilitated by the environmental pillar and the associated Environmental College under the PPN arrangements. To join the Environment Electoral College under the PPN, an organisation's primary objectives and activities must be environmental (i.e. ecological) protection and/or environmental sustainability. Membership of this Electoral College will be validated by the environmental pillar at a national level. (For national pillar contacts, see [Appendix 2](#)).

Particular regard will need to be had to the nature of each particular sector. The local authority will provide sufficient time, information and facilities to the sectors, if

required, to enable the nomination of a representative(s). The Draft Scheme will reflect the authority's proposals to enable this to be put in place.

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

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.

While a sector may be represented on more than one SPC, regard should be had to ensure that each sector (apart from the agriculture/farming sector in the case of the more highly urbanised authorities) has a minimum representation of one person across the range of SPCs established in each local authority.

It is also suggested that when an SPC 'majors' in the area of a PPN College, it may benefit from more than one representation by that College.

6.5 Circulation of Draft Scheme

Following consideration by the Council the Draft scheme (as amended) should be forwarded for consideration to the PPN and to the appropriate contact points of the key national stakeholder pillars.

A notice to the effect that the Council has considered a draft scheme and has issued the draft scheme for consultation should be published in the local media and on the local authority's website. The advertisement should be of a size and form which is

easily recognisable to the reader and in plain language which describes the role of the SPCs to the reader.

It is further recommended that other media, including local radio, be used. Copies of the draft should be circulated on request.

Consideration might also be given to having copies available in public offices. A minimum period of one month and up to a maximum of six weeks will be allowed for the making of submissions on the scheme.

6.6 Adoption of Scheme

Following receipt of submissions on the Draft scheme, the Chief Executive, with the Cathaoirleach and the other representatives of the Council referred to in paragraph 6.1 above, will consider the submissions and make any amendments to the draft scheme as deemed appropriate for submission to the Council.

The Council will then adopt the revised scheme as presented or amended for the implementation of the SPC system.

While every effort must be made to accommodate the views and preferences of organisations as to the assignment of sectors to SPCs, and the number of representatives from each sector for each SPC, final designation of sectors and SPC places will rest with the authority.

6.7 Receipt of Nominations from the National Pillars

On adoption of the scheme the Local Authority will write to the contact persons of the National Key Stakeholder Pillars, (i.e. Business/Employers Pillar, Trade Union Pillar and Farming/Agricultural Pillar), enclosing the adopted scheme, seeking the nominations of the Pillars for their particular SPCs as outlined in the adopted scheme. The exact mechanism for selecting nominees will be left to the Business/Employers, Trade Union, and Farming/Agricultural pillars.

The sectors should be asked to bear in mind the objective of achieving at least 40% male and 40% female in the making of appointments, as well as the need to foster social inclusiveness and equality when selecting their representatives.

The selected members should be representative of local organisations active in the respective county or city, because it is the local perspective of the representative pillars that the members would be expected to bring to the SPCs. Local authorities should allow one month to enable the selection process by the national pillars. Any issues pertaining to the nomination mechanism used by these national pillars should be referred to the appropriate contact point.

Furthermore, the local authority will write to the national contact of the environmental sector seeking the validation of nominees to the Environment Electoral College under the PPN.

6.8 Receipt of Nominations from Other Sectors

With regard to the Community/Voluntary, Social Inclusion, and Environmental/Conservation Sectors, the local authority should write to the PPN secretariat, enclosing a copy of the scheme and advising that it will facilitate these sectors' organisations to meet each other, if appropriate, to select their representatives for the SPCs as set out in the adopted scheme. Local authorities will allow one month for the selection of representatives from these three sectors.

7 SPCs – The Participants

7.1 General

Each SPC should have as a minimum a total membership of nine.

This will enable a range of opinions and perspectives to be represented from the elected members and from the sectoral groups.

Particular care should be taken to avoid excessively large or unwieldy committees; this factor may need special consideration in the case of the very largest authorities. Nonetheless some flexibility in the level of membership should be considered if particular local circumstances indicate the need for greater membership.

- Each SPC must have at least one-third of the membership drawn from sectoral interests.
- SPCs should be constituted as soon as possible after a local election but not before full consultation and consideration of the procedure for the establishment as set out in these guidelines.
- The chairs of the SPCs should be appointed by the full council from among the councillor appointees to the SPC, i.e. the chairs will be council members.
- A Director of Services will attend meetings and provide support to each SPC. The Director will, subject to the Chief Executive's overall responsibility for staffing matters, work closely with the committee and be entitled to speak and participate at meetings.
- The formal appointment of sectoral interests to the SPC is a reserved function of the council, providing for appointment of the sectoral interests that have been nominated via the mechanisms in paragraphs 6.1 to 6.8.
- The SPC chairs should hold office for a minimum period of three years, which may be renewed by the council. Subsequent chairs should be appointed from among the existing councillor members of the SPC.
- In the third year of the electoral cycle, SPC membership should be reviewed by the local authority in order to give councillors an opportunity to leave the

membership of one or more SPCs, and seek membership of another SPC or SPCs.

- Full participation in meetings of the SPCs should be confined to the members of the SPC. Where policy matters of particular interest to other councillors or local interest groups arise (for example, proposals affecting a local area), the SPC could meet with the relevant municipal district members or groups.
- It is desirable that sectoral nominees would retain membership of the SPC for the life of the Council. It would be 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 will nominate a new representative, via the PPN, where applicable. Where a casual vacancy occurs it should likewise be filled by the relevant sector. Appointments in such circumstances remain reserved functions.
- If there is a PPN vacancy to fill on any of its committees/ structures, the local authority should notify the PPN Secretariat and ask that the representative(s) to fill these seats be chosen by the PPN. The Secretariat will notify relevant member organisations of the vacancy and arrange a meeting of all those organisations with an interest/involvement in the area where the vacancy has arisen to choose a representative.

7.2 Councillors

The following principles should be applied in relation to the involvement of councillors in the SPC process.

- Every councillor should as a matter of equity and good practice have the opportunity to serve on more than one SPC during a single council term. This will enable a councillor to develop further expertise and experience of the particular service or services and to develop a degree of specialisation.
- Councillors may not be nominated to represent sectoral interests.

- A person ceasing to be a Councillor would automatically cease membership of the SPC.
- A councillor should not serve on more than two SPCs insofar as possible, again for reasons of equity and good practice and workload.
- SPC councillor membership should reflect the proportionality and the distribution of elected representation on the full council. It is also important that the SPC membership should, as far as it is practical, be representative of each of the municipal districts in the local authority. The Local Government (Reorganisation) Act 1985 (section 27) was designed to allow for a basic element of proportionality in appointments to committees etc. However, many local authorities operate (as they are entitled under the Act) their own local and more finely developed arrangements to ensure fair play for all concerned. It is, however, impossible to legislate fully for such goodwill and practice. Therefore, it is all the more important with the SPCs that all local authorities adopt and implement (and be clearly seen by the public to do so) an approach which ensures that the various political and other interests represented on the full council are treated fairly, and equitably represented in the SPC system. This principle remains in the event that a replacement is sought for a councillor who ceases to be a member of the SPC.
- The allocation of SPC chairs should also reflect equitably the spread of elected representation on the council, including, as far as it is practical, be representative of each of the municipal districts in the local authority.⁴ The points made above as to good will and fair play are equally relevant here. However, where agreement in this regard is not possible, the group of SPC chairs to be appointed should technically be treated for appointment purposes as if it constituted a separate committee, to ensure an equitable spread of representation as SPC chairs.

⁴ Where it is not possible for the SPC chairs to be drawn from the full list of municipal districts, the provisions of section 133(1) of the 2001 Act (as amended by section 48(a) of the 2014 Act) will provide for representation of each municipal district on the CPG (see paragraph 1.2 above).

7.3 Sectoral Representatives

The following principles should be respected in the selection of groups and associations for a particular sector **including those being facilitated by the national pillars.**

- Groups/associations should be active in the area or an area of the authority and have a county wide impact or at a minimum a relevance in a locality or number of localities in the area.
- Groups/associations should be open to new members, hold AGMs and regular meetings, and should be broadly representative and accountable.
- Single interest groups should be eligible, e.g. campaign groups focused on the disabled or elderly. Single issue groups should be encouraged to affiliate with their relevant PPNs to ensure that they are also represented. Local Development Agencies represented at Strategy Group/LCDC level should not be represented on an SPC. Arrangements should be in place, however, to facilitate meaningful engagement and consultation with such Local Development Agencies as part of the policy-making process. (See paragraph 6.4).

Each sector should select its own nominee(s) via the PPN. The nomination of sectoral representatives is the sole responsibility of each particular sector. However, the authority may recommend that such nominee(s) have broad knowledge (or expertise) of a particular nature.

Each sector will be asked to nominate the appropriate number of representatives as set out in the adopted scheme to the SPCs. While every effort will be made to accommodate preferences, final decisions on membership will ultimately rest with the local authority as a reserved function.

An appropriate time frame to enable the nomination process should be provided. It is considered that one month should be sufficient in this regard.

7.4 State Agencies/Local Development Agencies

Statutory State and Local Development Agencies should not be included as nominating bodies to the sectors and should not be represented on an SPC.

However, sectors may nominate persons from a non-statutory local development organisation to sit on an SPC.

Consideration should also be given by SPCs and the Council to inviting officials from such agencies and others, operating in the local authority's area, to attend and participate in SPC meetings where such would be beneficial in providing input and expertise in matters of direct relevance to the SPC's work. See also paragraph 4.83.9 above.

7.5 Expenses Incurred by Members

In general, any expenses arising for a SPC member would be met by the organisations the SPC member is representing. However, those SPC members whose expenses could not be met in that manner would be entitled to travel expenses for attendance at SPC meetings.

The local authority should consult with all sectoral members to determine which, if any, members are not receiving expenses from their own organisations for attendance at SPC meetings. Any member not already receiving expenses will be able to claim them from the local authority.

8 Implementation Support Measures

8.1 Support Measures

Each sector should use the PPN for a structured feedback process between sectoral representatives and their nominating sectors.

8.2 Availability of Information

Where relevant and to ensure transparency, appropriate information should be made publicly available. The local authority should take reasonable measures to publicise the work of the SPCs, in particular the outcomes and impacts of the SPCs' work.

This includes making available in a timely manner minutes and reports processed by the SPCs.

In instances where documentation is of a confidential nature, this should be specifically identified as such. Any documentation not so identified will be regarded as available to the public in general and the sectors in particular.

An agreed statement of (non-confidential) outcomes will be provided as soon as practicable after a meeting.

8.3 Standing Orders and the Regulating of Meetings

It is recommended that each local authority should adopt separate standing orders for SPC meetings, to help ensure that SPC members have a clear understanding of procedures. These could elaborate on the local authority's SPC scheme and give necessary detail to clarify to members the workings of the SPC and SPC meeting procedures.

SPC standing orders will be adopted by the Council following recommendation from each SPC and efforts should be made to reflect the various perspectives represented on the SPCs and the nature of the business.

In drafting adopting the standing orders, the council should have due regard for good practice. The standing orders should include provision for:

- The times, days and locations of meetings, including provision to vary these where feasible, to enhance inclusivity and attendance;
- Appropriate accessibility requirements for meeting arrangements;
- The minimum terms of notice which should mirror those of the Council;
- The ordering of the Agenda;
- The provision to suspend standing orders;
- The right to speak and equality in making views known;
- The process associated with handling confidential material;
- The procedures for identification of conflicts of interests and abstention from discussions and voting;
- The presence of the public and media representatives at SPC meetings, in accordance with section 45 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended;
- Provision for procedures to allow for review of previous committee business and recommendations.

A copy of the local authority's SPC standing orders should be supplied to each SPC member.

8.4 Training Provision

The local authority should include in the draft scheme (see paragraph 6.1 above) provision for the enabling of mandatory induction and on-going training of members of the SPC, in addition to specific training for SPC chairs. This should include:

- Workshops on policy to cover the various areas within the remit of the SPCs, particularly in respect of climate action;
- Briefings on the reform of local government;
- Briefings on the role and functions of local government;
- Legal and ethical responsibilities of SPC members, including but not limited to GDPR, lobbying, etc.;
- Skills orientated training such as team building.

This may be facilitated through the Training Officers in each authority addressing training needs identified through a consultative process with the sectors generally and the SPC members specifically.

8.5 Other Support Services

Beyond the foregoing introductory measures, a key element in supporting SPC members in their role will be the establishment of networks of SPC chairs and Directors of Services. The Local Government Management Agency will be tasked with developing a virtual network.

Appendix 1 - Summary of Central Features of the SPC System

- 1 The role of the Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) and the Corporate Policy Group (CPG) is to formulate policy proposals, evaluate and report on policy implementation, for consideration and final decision by the full council.
- 2 A focus on the SPCs' policy-making and strategic role is fundamental to the SPC concept. In their work, SPCs are not concerned with individual representational or operational issues.
- 3 The SPC system presents councillors with a prime opportunity to become more involved in policy formulation. It provides a chance to review and optimise committee structures and related procedures, which demands a rationalisation of existing committees and standing procedures.
- 4 Each authority will have generally four SPCs, with the option of more in the largest authorities, if warranted.
- 5 Local authorities are statutorily required to have an SPC for Economic Development and Enterprise. All SPCs should consider climate action as a cross-cutting issue in their work programmes.
- 6 SPCs are to be chaired by one of the councillor members.
- 7 SPCs are to have a minimum total membership of nine.
- 8 At least one third of the members of each SPC are to be drawn from relevant sectoral interests; to provide relevant expertise and advice and allow for a range of inputs in the formulation of policy
- 9 Relevant organisations for each sector will be identified as early as possible, parallel with the drafting of the scheme.
- 10 Each sector will select its own nominee(s) via the PPN, where appropriate.
- 11 The CPG is to comprise the Cathaoirleach of the local authority, the SPC chairs and a representative of each municipal district, as needed, in

accordance with section 133(1) of the 2001 Act. It is to be chaired by the Cathaoirleach. It will be supported by the Chief Executive⁵.

12 The role of the Corporate Policy Group (CPG) is to coordinate the work of the SPCs and facilitate the flow of the outcome of the work of the SPCs to the council.

13 Area Committees can complement the SPC system in local authorities that do not have a municipal district. Local operational matters should be assigned to these area committees as the SPC system will not deal with local representational issues and operational issues.

⁵ In Limerick City and County Council, the CPG will be chaired by the Mayor and the Príomh Comhairleoir will be a member. The Director General will provide support.

Appendix 2 – National Contact Points of Key Stakeholders

Pillar	Name & Address	Telephone and e-mail
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	Deirdre Mannion Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) Head Office 31-32 Parnell Square Dublin 1	01 889 7726 deirdre.mannion@ictu.ie
Environment	Irish Environmental Network Macro Community Resource Centre 1 Green Street Dublin 7	01 878 0116 office@ien.ie

gov.ie/housing

The Department of
Housing, Local Government and Heritage



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland