



Comhshaol, Pobal agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Community and Local Government



LG 07/2014

29 May 2014

Establishment of New Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs)

Dear Manager

I am directed by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to refer to circular letter LG 06/2014 of 28 May 2014 to county and city managers regarding certain matters to which local authorities are required to attend following the local elections. The circular letter indicated, *inter alia*, that a further communication may be issued in relation to Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs). This circular provides guidance in relation to the establishment and operation of SPCs following this month's local elections.

A copy of this circular, which is available on the SharePoint system, should be given to each elected member.

Establishment of New SPCs

The statutory basis for SPCs is set out in section 48 of the Local Government Act 2001 (the 2001 Act). Furthermore, section 48(1A) of the 2001 Act, as inserted by section 41(a) of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, 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".

Following the local elections, it is necessary for each county and city council to establish new SPCs in line with the revised guidelines published by the Department in June 2014 entitled: *Corporate Policy Groups and Strategic Policy Committees: Guidelines for establishment and operation* and which accompany this Circular.

As a first step, each council should, at the earliest opportunity, select the Chairs-designate for each SPC. These together with the Cathaoirleach will assist the Chief Executive in drafting the SPC scheme and to advance the process of establishing the SPCs. In this regard, it is important that every effort is made to have an SPC scheme that ensures participation and support from all political representatives as required by the guidelines. The chairs are appointed by the full council for a minimum period of three years and the overall spread of SPC chairs must, in accordance with the guidelines, reflect the political representational spread on the full council. Paragraph 6.2 of the revised 2014 guidelines refers.

The role of the SPC Chairs is regarded as pivotal to the success of both the SPCs and the Corporate Policy Group (CPG). Accordingly, local authorities are asked to 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,
- they appreciate the need to work with the relevant Director of Service to facilitate the smooth and effective operation of the SPCs and the CPG (which comprises the SPC Chairs along with the Mayor/Cathaoirleach supported by the Chief Executive).

Local authorities are required to engage in public consultation on the draft scheme. However, it is not envisaged that the same level of public consultation in relation to the drafting of the scheme for the new SPCs as outlined in paragraph 5.5 of the revised 2014 guidelines will be needed in cases where the previous scheme is not being substantially altered. Local authorities are free, however, to engage in this more intensive consultation process where they feel it is appropriate.

Local authorities should take the necessary steps to seek new nominations from the Business and Employers', Farming and Agricultural and Trade Unions', Pillars and the Community and Voluntary, Social Inclusion and Environmental Sectors in accordance with paragraphs 5.4 to 5.8 of the Revised 2014 Guidelines. Details of the national contact points for the Business and Employers', Farming and Agricultural and Trade Unions' Pillars and the Environmental Sector are attached at **Appendix A**.

All necessary action for the establishment and commencement of SPC operations at an early date should now proceed.

Any queries may be directed to Sean O'Suilleabhain (Tel. 01 888 2800 or email sean.osuilleabhain@environ.ie).

Yours sincerely

Donal Enright
Local Government Policy and
Motor Tax Section

To each County / City Manager

Copy for information to: AILG and LAMA

National Contact Points of Key Stakeholders

Pillar	Name & Address	Telephone and e-mail
Farming	Gerry Gunning	01-4500266
	Irish Farmers Association (IFA) Irish Farm Centre Bluebell Dublin 12	gerrygunning@ifa.ie
Business	Kim Mulligan	01-4004300
	Chambers Ireland 22-24 Lower Mount Street Dublin 2	kim.mulligan@chambers.ie
Trade Unions	Fergus Whelan	01-8897777
	Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) Head Office 31-32 Parnell Square Dublin 1	fergus.whelan@ictu.ie
Environment	Michael Ewing	071-9667373
	Environment Pillar – Coordinator Knockvicar Boyle Co Roscommon	michael@environmentalpillar.ie

Corporate Policy Groups

And

Strategic Policy Committees

Guidelines for establishment and operation

June 2014

Corporate Policy Groups
and
Strategic Policy Committees

Guidelines for establishment and operation

The following are guidelines from the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government 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

The Government's *Action Programme for Effective Local Government* acknowledged that Corporate Policy Groups (CPGs) and Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) have achieved a measure of success in providing a focus for elected members to input into policy formation. The *Action Programme* also recognised reinforcement is needed in order that the role of the Cathaoirleach and members, as leaders of their authority and the local community, can be better delivered. Other than in matters of staffing, the elected members should have a more visible and effective role in policy setting and in the oversight of the executive actions of the local authority. The extent of changes proposed in the *Action Programme*, particularly the oversight and policy formation role of the elected members, local development/ local government alignment, location of the local enterprise role in local government, enhancement of the economic development role of local government, establishment of the new sub-county arrangements, and changes in configuration of senior management structures arising from the workforce planning process, all have potential implications for the system of SPCs and CPGs. Accordingly, the structure, role and operational mechanisms of the CPG and SPC have been reviewed and strengthened appropriately in the context of implementation of the reform programme.

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. The CPG provides a forum for policy issues which transcend the remit of individual SPCs

and municipal districts. The work of the different SPCs is co-ordinated through the CPG with membership comprising the

- Cathaoirleach;
- chairpersons of each SPC; and
- where the municipal district is not already represented, as 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).

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; see the separate guidance on this role. It will also 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 also participates and supports the work of the CPG. The role of the CPG is strategic and it links and co-ordinates the work of the different SPCs. The Cathaoirleach reports to the full Council on work of the CPG; the Chairs of each SPC report back to their Committee similarly, as do the representative 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.

The SPCs

- assist the council in the formulation, development and review of policy;
- reflect the major functions or services of a local authority within the broader context;
- are tailored to the size, membership and administrative resources of a local authority **but generally be four in number**; and
- have one third of their membership drawn from sectors relevant to the committees' work.

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 elected representatives have a similar role to that of a board of directors. 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 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”. This is the home in SPC scheme for the economic development and enterprise support functions. 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). Specific consideration should be given to inclusion of the Environment Sector on the SPC for Economic Development and Enterprise in view of the expertise available within the sector in relation to sustainable development. In view of the central role of this SPC in relation to economic development locally and enterprise support, the local authority should assess what other related functions, previously managed by another SPC, should be integrated into the SPC for Economic Development and Enterprise.

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. The creation of the SPC for Economic Development and Enterprise will not necessarily require an increase in the number of SPCs, but as outlines above, will require a restructuring of existing SPCs where the economic and enterprise functions are discharged by more than one SPC.

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, the guidelines allow a measure of discretion to local authorities in establishing an SPC structure which takes account of local circumstances and which best meets local needs.

Nonetheless, the establishment of similar SPC structures across local authorities generally make the networks of SPC chairs more effective, as well as facilitating liaison arrangements with Government Departments, State bodies and regional assemblies.

2. CORPORATE POLICY GROUP

2.1. CPG - Structure

The Corporate Policy Group (CPG) comprises the Cathaoirleach of the authority as its chair together with the chairs of each of the SPCs and in the case of a municipal district without out a SPC chair, a representative of the municipal district concerned. The CPG links the work of the different SPCs, act as a sort of cabinet and provide a forum where policy positions affecting the whole council can be agreed for submission to the full council. It is supported by the Chief Executive. The CPG does not act as conduit between the council and the SPCs as this could cause the CPG to act as an additional bureaucratic layer or bottleneck and lead to unnecessary delays. The CPG is represented at meetings of the council by the Cathaoirleach.

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 (see separate guidance on the budgetary process);
- 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 the question consistency or avoidance of unnecessary duplication is referred to it by the Chief Executive;
- monitor the overall performance of a local authority;
- 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);
- co-ordinate the work of the SPCs and monitor their work programmes;
- request SPCs to consider particular policy issues where appropriate.
- provide feedback to the SPCs on council policy and views in areas relevant to the SPCs.

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

The council is and remains the decision making authority, and 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. The organisation of agendas, identification of strategic issues and supply of reports and necessary background or other material for consideration is also crucial. Ultimately, though, much depends on the input of members, both councillors and others, in focusing on the strategic issues and in taking a strategic overview of the relevant policy area in the wider context.

Accordingly,

- SPCs should adopt a multi-annual work programme linked to the local authority's Corporate Plan and updated regularly as necessary;
- SPC meeting documentation should ideally be circulated to SPC members two weeks in advance of meetings, and additionally, agenda and minutes should be circulated to SPC members and other councillors in a county council area
- The CPG should decide the work programmes of the SPCs and recommend issues to be considered by the SPCs.

3.2. SPC Chairs

The SPC chairs have a pivotal role of the in ensuring the success of CPGs and SPCs. In that context, local authorities are asked to 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 ,

to facilitate the smooth and effective operation of the SPCs and the CPG. Accordingly, following each local election, the Chair for each SPC, the Cathaoirleach and the Chief Executive will together assess the SPC scheme and amend it as appropriate. Furthermore, it is important that every effort is made to have an SPC scheme that ensures participation and support from all political representatives as required by the guidelines. The chairs are appointed by the full council for a minimum period of three years and the overall spread of SPC chairs must, in accordance with the guidelines, reflect the elected representational spread on the full 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.

3.3. 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. 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 amended respectively by sections 47 and 51 of the 2014 Act.

3.5. 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 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 to advise on the preparation of preliminary papers for consideration by the council.

3.6. 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.

3.7. Requirement to have regard to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

When Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES), the intended successors to Regional Policy Guidelines, have been prepared by the Regional Assemblies, there is a requirement on each SPC to have regard to the RSES.

This requirement is set out in section 48(3B) of the 2001 Act, as inserted by section 41 of the 2014 Act.

3.8. 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 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.

3.9. 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 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.

3.10. 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.

3.11. SPC Meetings

3.11.1. 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. Paragraph 3.5 above will be of particular importance in this regard.

A calendar of SPC meetings should be agreed at the start of each year. SPCs should normally be held about 4 times yearly at suitable times for all SPC members.

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.

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.

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

The agenda and minutes of SPC meetings should also be circulated well in advance to all SPC members.

3.11.2. SPC Meetings – Policy Support and Development

Each SPC should have an annual work programme and the work programme should be linked to the local authority's corporate plan.

In the light of discussions at paragraph 3.5 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 practicable 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 etc.

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.

3.11.3. SPC Meetings - Training

Training programmes would be valuable for SPC members, and consideration of needs in this regard could 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.

3.11.4. 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.

3.11.5. 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.

4. SPC FRAMEWORK

4.1. Relevant Factors

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

4.2. 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 very largest authorities (Dublin City and County authorities and Cork County) 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.

4.3. 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 above, and the requirements of section 48(1A) of the Local Government Act 2001, in addition to the SPC for Economic Development and Enterprise, SPCs could be configured as follows:

- environmental and planning policy;
- transportation and infrastructural policy;
- housing policy, social and cultural development.

This type of configuration or some variation of it would assist local authorities in developing comprehensive, broad-ranging policies for the development of their communities and of their areas. Given their scale of operations and resources and their statutory basis, local authorities play a pivotal role in underpinning and developing the local economy and community, and can act as a catalyst in the promotion of such development in combination with the various interests. Development effort is enhanced through working in partnership not only with other public sector agencies but with business, voluntary/ community, trade union and other sectors; the proposed configuration facilitates this. This configuration, together with the LCDC, anchored in the main local government services, would facilitate networking and information exchange among SPC chairs and among Directors of Services and would facilitate linkage with public authorities.

A configuration along these lines is therefore strongly recommended as a general guide for all local authorities. It is of course accepted that there might be some variations to take account of local circumstances.

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

4.4. 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 has been underpinned by the establishment of municipal districts in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Reform Act 2024. In that context Area Committees will no longer be relevant in local authorities with municipal districts.

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 deal with matters relating to the operational delivery of local authority services.

5. THE SPC SCHEME

5.1. 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 of the Council, 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 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 also include proposals 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 schemes 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).

5.2. 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.

5.3. 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 (Rural Authorities)
- Environmental / Conservation
- Development / Construction
- Business / Commercial
- Trade Union
- Community/Voluntary
- Social Inclusion

5.4. 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 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**). 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 5.7 below).

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.

While a sector may be represented on more than one SPC, regard should be had, however, 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.

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.

5.5. 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.

5.6. 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 5.1 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 SPC's, and the number of representatives from each sector for each SPC, final designation of sectors and SPC places will rest with the authority.

5.7. 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, Farming/ Agricultural Pillar and Environmental Pillar), enclosing the adopted scheme, seeking the nominations of the Pillars for their particular SPCs as outlined in the adopted scheme. The exact mechanism 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 a 40% gender balance 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.

5.8. 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 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.

6. SPCs - THE PARTICIPANTS

6.1. 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 both from the elected members as well as 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 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, normally providing for appointment of the sectoral interests that have been nominated via the mechanisms in paragraphs 5.4 to 5.8 above.
- The SPC chairs should hold office for a minimum period of three years, which could be renewed by the council. Subsequent chairs should be appointed from among the existing councillor members of the SPC.
- 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.

6.2. 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 an SPC. 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.
- SPC Membership for Councillors should be for the lifetime of the Council. 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 good will 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.

- 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.¹ 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.

6.3. 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 not be considered for inclusion in the sectors.
- 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).

¹ 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).

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.

6.4. State Agencies / Local Development Agencies

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 local development agency to sit on an SPC. Consideration should 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 3.8 above.

6.5. 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 expenses will be met by the local authority.

7. IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT MEASURES

7.1. Support Measures

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

7.2. Availability of Information

Where relevant and to ensure transparency, appropriate information should be made publicly available. This includes making available 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.

7.3. Standing orders and the regulating of meetings

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. The standing orders should include provision for

- The times, days and locations of meetings;
- 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;
- Provision for procedures to allow for review of previous committee business and recommendations.

7.4. Training Provision

The local authority should include in the draft scheme (see paragraph 5.1 above) provision for the enabling of on-going training of members of the SPC. This should include -

- Workshops on policy to cover the various areas within the remit of the SPCs;
- Briefings on the reform of local government;
- Briefings on the role and functions of local government;
- 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.

7.5. 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 SPC's, with the option of more in the largest authorities, if warranted.
- (5) SPCs are to be chaired by one of the councillor members.
- (6) SPCs are to have a minimum total membership of nine.
- (7) 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
- (8) Relevant organisations for each sector will be identified as early as possible, parallel with the drafting of the scheme.
- (9) Each sector will select its own nominee(s) via the PPN, where appropriate.
- (10) 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 Executive.
- (11) 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.
- (12) 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.

APPENDIX 2

National Contact Points of Key Stakeholders

Pillar	Name & Address	Telephone and e-mail
Farming	Gerry Gunning	01-4500266
	Irish Farmers Association (IFA) Irish Farm Centre Bluebell Dublin 12	gerrygunning@ifa.ie
Business	Kim Mulligan	01-4004300
	Chambers Ireland 22-24 Lower Mount Street Dublin 2	kim.mulligan@chambers.ie
Trade Unions	Fergus Whelan	01-8897777
	Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) Head Office 31-32 Parnell Square Dublin 1	fergus.whelan@ictu.ie
Environment	Michael Ewing	071-9667373
	Environment Pillar – Coordinator Knockvicar Boyle Co Roscommon	michael@environmentalpillar.ie