



Sligo County Council

Strategic Policy Committees Scheme

2019-2024

November 2019

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1. Introduction

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

The SPCs

- Assist the Council in the formulation, development and review of policy;
- Reflect the major functions or services of a local authority;
- Are tailored to the size, membership and administrative resources of the Council; and
- Have one third of their membership drawn from sectors relevant to the work of the Committee.

SPCs have a major role in assisting and advising the Council in relation to functions of a strategic statutory nature. They also have functions in other areas including the establishment of priorities for particular services. 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. The SPCs 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.

While the role of each SPC is to assist the Council in the formulation and development of policy, the final policy decisions rest ultimately with the full Council.

Circular Letter LG 07/2014 dated 29th May 2014 from the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government outlines the requirement for each County and City council, following the local elections, to establish new SPC's in line with the revised guidelines published by the Department in June 2014 - *'Corporate Policy Groups and Strategic Policy Committees: Guidelines for establishment and operation'*

Following Sligo County Council's Annual General Meeting on 7th June 2019, it is proposed to establish Strategic Policy Committees in accordance with the above legislation and guidelines.

2. Corporate Policy Group (CPG)

The statutory basis for Corporate Policy Group (CPG) is set out in Section 133 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended by Section 48 of the Local Government (Reform) Act 2014. The CPG comprises of the Cathaoirleach of the Council and the SPC Chairs, and in the case of a Municipal District without an SPC Chair, a representative from the Municipal District concerned. The CPG is supported by the Chief Executive. The role of the CPG, is to advise and assist the elected Council, with full decision making authority remaining with the Council. The Cathaoirleach reports to the full Council on the work of the CPG. It is a matter for each Council, in co-operation with the Chief Executive, to determine the range and responsibilities and tasks of the CPG.

The CPG should:

- play a key role in preparation of the annual budget and Corporate Plan;
- provide advice and assistance to the elected council on matters 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 of consistency or avoidance of unnecessary duplication is referred to it by the Chief Executive;
- deals with overall issues in relation to service delivery plans , customer service, value for money etc.
- 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.
- monitor the overall performance of the Local Authority

3. Lobbying Act 2015 - Transparency Code

The Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 (the Act) is designed to provide information to the public regarding who is lobbying whom about what. Individuals and organisations who participate in Strategic Policy Committees established by local authorities may have obligations Under the Act.

A critical element of public policy formulation by Strategic Policy Committees is the availability to the local authorities of expertise, skills and knowledge from persons outside of the public service. Where membership of the committee comprises of at least one person who, for the purposes of the Act is a Designated Public Official, it may be the case that communications within the group could be considered lobbying communications. The person making these communications may be required to register as a lobbyist and to submit a return of this communication to the Lobbying Register.

However, the Act provides for an exception from the requirement to register in such cases once specified transparency criteria have been put in place. A transparency code was published by the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform to address this situation. Communications between members of Strategic Policy Committees about the work of the committee would be exempt where the group in question complies with the Transparency Code.

4. Role and Objectives of Strategic Policy Committees

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 flexible. The primary role of the SPC, as a Committee of the Council, is to consider matters connected with the formulation, development, monitoring and review of policy which relate to the functions of the Council and advise the Council on those matters. The Council is and remains the decision making authority, and the SPC has no remit in relation to routine operational matters in relation to the delivery of services.

The work of the SPC will be supported by the relevant Director of Services and their staff. The SPC chair and Director of Services will work together to focus the work of the SPC on relevant policy issues through the organisation of agendas, identification of strategic issues, supply of reports and necessary background material to inform the SPC. Relevant matters for consideration by the SPC may also be referred to the SPC at the initiative of the CPG or on the request of the Council. In this regard the Guidelines recommend that:

- SPCs should adopt a multi-annual work programme linked to the local authority's Corporate Plan and update 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
- The CPG should decide the work programmes of the SPCs and recommend issues to be considered by them.

A more detailed overview of the role of the SPC is set out in the guidelines published by the Department in June 2014 - *'Corporate Policy Groups and Strategic Policy Committees: Guidelines for establishment and operation'*

5. Structure and Operation of Strategic Policy Committees

STRUCTURE OF SPCs

Factors taken into account when determining the overall framework of SPCs included:

- 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 organisational arrangement of service groupings within the council and the remit envisaged for each SPC;
- the need to ensure that the organisational and financial resources of the council are not over-stretched;
- integration with other meeting requirements and committee structures and ensuring streamlined procedures generally
- the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), including its membership and remit.

The proposed structure of Sligo County Council's Strategic Policy Committees is as follows:

1. SPC 1 - Housing & Corporate
2. SPC2 - Environment & Infrastructure
3. SPC 3 - Planning, Community & Economic Development, Arts & Culture
4. SPC 4 - Climate Change

Each SPC must have as a minimum total membership of nine, and one-third of membership must be drawn from sectoral interests. The appointment of sectoral interests to the SPC is a reserved function. Guidelines provide that each member of the Council should, as a matter of equity and good practice be a member of at least one SPC.

The proposed composition of the SPC's is:

- SPC 1 - 6 elected members 4 nominees from sectoral interests
SPC 2 - 6 elected members 4 nominees from sectoral interests
SPC 3 - 8 elected members and 5 nominees from sectoral interests
SPC 4 - 6 elected members and 4 nominees from sectoral interests

The chairs are appointed by the full council for a minimum period of three years, which may be renewed by the Council or they may hold the position for the lifetime of the Council.

Membership of the SPCs, both Councillors and sectoral representatives, shall be for the lifetime of the Council. Casual vacancies which arise will be filled by the sector involved. Nominating bodies may also de-select their nominees.

Appointment of Elected Members to SPCs

The Principles set out in paragraph 6.2 of the *'Corporate Policy Groups and Strategic Policy Committees: Guidelines for establishment and operation'* (June 2014) shall be applied in the selection of Councillors to the SPC's:

- Each member of Sligo County Council should, as a matter of equity and good practice be a member of at least one SPC.
- 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.
- 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.
- Sligo County Council respects the requirements for Gender Balance in relation to the formulation of the SPCs and in so far as possible will ensure that this occurs in the nomination of members of the Council to the SPCs.
- 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.

6. Consultation / Nominations

Appointment of Sectoral Representation to SPCs

Each SPC must have at least one third of its membership from external sectors relevant to the committees remit. In accordance with the 2014 guideline the following factors 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.

A minimum of 6 and where appropriate, 7 sectors should be represented on the SPCs. Configuration as follows: -

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

Nomination Process

- The nomination process for representatives from 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 and agreed by the Trade Union Pillar.

- The environmental/conservation sector will be facilitated by the environmental pillar and the associated Environmental College under the Public Participation Network (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.
- The environmental/conservation, community / voluntary and social inclusion sectors will be determined on the basis of the local nomination process through the PPN.

While a sector may be represented on more than one SPC regard should be had to ensure that each sector has a minimum representation of one person across the range of SPCs established in the local authority. The final decision as to the sectoral make-up of each SPC rests with Sligo County Council.

Member Organisations when joining the PPN at a county level member organisations must opt to be part of one of the 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.

The following principles are to apply in the nomination process:

- 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.
- Each sector should select its own nominee.

- State and Local Development Agencies should not be included as nominating bodies to the sectors and should not be represented on the SPC.
- Nominations from the sectors should, insofar as possible, reflect an appropriate gender balance.

The assignment of Sectoral representation to the four SPC's to be established is as follows:

	SPC1 (6/5)	SPC2 (6/4)	SPC3 (8/6)	SPC4 (6/4)
Sectors to be represented	Housing & Corporate	Environment & Infrastructure	Planning, Community & Economic Dev., Arts & Culture	Climate Change
Agriculture / Farming		X	X	X
Environmental/ Conservation	X	X	X	X
Development/ Construction	X	X	X	
Business / Commercial				X
Trade Union	X		X	
Community/Voluntary	X	X	X	X
Social Inclusion	X		X	

7. Procedures for Adoption of SPC Scheme

Circulation of Draft Scheme

Following consideration by the Council the Draft scheme (as amended) will 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 will be published in the local media and on the Council's website. 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.

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 of the Guidelines, 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.

Receipt of Nominations from the National Pillars

On adoption of the scheme the Council 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 Council will allow one month to enable the selection process by the national pillars.

The Council will also write to the national contact of the environmental sector seeking the validation of nominees to the Environment Electoral College under the PPN.

Receipt of Nominations From Other Sectors

With regard to the Community / Voluntary / Social Inclusion and Environmental / Conservation Sectors, the Council will 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. The Council will allow one month for the selection of representatives from these three sectors.

8. Operation of SPCs

The 2014 Guidelines set out the following procedures in relation to operation of SPC meetings:

- A calendar of SPC meetings should be agreed at the start of each year. They will meet as frequently as necessary and at least once every quarter. Each SPC will arrange its own business and proceedings, including the fixing of dates, times and venues of meetings.
- The SPC Chair and relevant Director of Services 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.
- SPC meeting documentation will 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 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.
- The Chief Executive is required to advise and assist the SPC generally with regard to the performance of the functions of the SPC, including when requested to do so by the SPC members. 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 Services for onward transmission to the Chief Executive and other local authority staff as appropriate.
- 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.
- 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.
- Many councils already promote the use of the Irish language in various facets of their work and this practice could be extended to SPCs.

Contact Points for National Pillars

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	James Kiernan	01-4004300
	Chambers Ireland 22-24 Lower Mount Street Dublin 2	james.kiernan@chambers.ie
Trade Unions	Fiona Dunne	01-8897777
	Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) Head Office 31-32 Parnell Square Dublin 1	fiona.dunne@onemovement.ie
Environment	Michael Ewing	071-9667373
	Environment Pillar - Coordinator Knockvicar Boyle Co Roscommon	michael@environmentalpillar.ie