

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LIATROMA
LEITRIM COUNTY COUNCIL



SPC SCHEME (DRAFT)
– 2014 - 2019

1. Establishment of Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs)

The statutory basis for Strategic Policy Committee's (SPC's) is set out in the Local Government Act, 2001 (Section 48) as amended by Section 41 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, which provides that "*a Local Authority shall establish committees to be known as 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 advise the authority on those matters.*" 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.

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.***

While 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, there is a requirement that Strategic Policy Committees will:

- Assist the Council in the formulation, development and review of policy
- Reflect the major functions or services of a local authority within a broader context
- Are tailored to the size, membership and administrative resources of the local authority but generally be four in number, and
- Have a minimum one third of their membership drawn from sectors relevant to the committee's work

The factors to be taken into account in determining the overall framework of SPC's 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 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.

At the Annual Meeting of Leitrim County Council on 6th June 2014, following the Local Elections, the establishment of three (3) SPCs was approved by the Members:

- Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning
- Housing Policy Social and Cultural Development
- Environmental, Transportation and Infrastructural Policy

This structure is considered to be in the best interests of efficient policy development and its implementation, which will ultimately reflect itself in improved service delivery and will facilitate the Council adequately responding to the emerging challenges ahead.

2. Role of Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs)

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 the formulation, development and review of policy. The remit of the SPCs is to deal only with policy matters and as such they are strategic in nature. They have no remit in relation to routine operational matters in relation to delivery of 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.

The work of the SPC is supported by the relevant Director of Services and his/her staff. Background work, discussion and recommendations will be completed at SPC level before final consideration and ratification by the Council. Each SPC will provide advice and reports to the Council on any policy matter within their range of responsibility or on related issues. This may be on the initiative of the SPC or on the request of the Council or the CPG. The SPC will be represented at Council meeting by the Chairperson, who will normally present the outcome of SPC work to the full Council. Each SPC shall take account of the Councils overall corporate policy and objectives and be responsive to external consultation.

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. Operation of Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs)

The 2014 Guidelines for establishment and operation of Corporate Policy Groups and Strategic Policy Committees set out the following procedures in relation to SPC Meetings:-

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.

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.

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 between the Chief Executive/Director of Service on the formulation, development, monitoring and review of policy, 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.

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.

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.

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 Scheme – First Steps

Selection of Chairpersons

As a first step in the review of the SPC Scheme each County Council was required to select the Chairs-designate for each SPC - these, together with the Cathaoirleach, assist the Chief Executive in drafting the SPC Scheme and in advancing the process of establishing the new SPC's.

At the Annual Meeting of Leitrim County Council on 6th June 2014 the Members of the Council approved the appointment of the Chairpersons of the 3 No. Leitrim County Council SPC's as follows:

- Councillor Frank Dolan
- Councillor Sinead Guckian
- Councillor Enda Stenson

The SPC Chairs should have an interest in the work of the SPC and provide leadership in working with the Director of Service to facilitate the smooth and effective operation of the SPC.

It is a matter for the Council to appoint the Chairpersons to the individual SPCs. The Chairpersons are appointed for a minimum period of three years.

Establishment of Corporate Policy Group (CPG)

The Council also establishes a Corporate Policy Group (CPG) which comprises the Cathairleach of the Council and the three SPC Chairs, and in the case of a municipal district without an SPC chair, a representative of the municipal district concerned and is supported by the Chief Executive. The role of the CPG is to advise and to assist the Council, with full decision-making authority remaining with the Council. The Cathairleach 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 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.

5. Strategic Policy Committees 2009-2014 – Structure & Membership

Three (3) Strategic Policy Committees are proposed as follows:

- Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning
- Housing Policy Social and Cultural Development
- Environmental, Transportation and Infrastructural Policy

Each SPC shall consist of six (6) elected members and four (4) nominees from sectoral interests

The Council will appoint the Chairperson of each SPC. The Chairperson will hold office for a minimum period of 3 years which may be renewed by 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

In the selection of Councillors to the various SPCs the principles outlined in Paragraph 6.2 of the guideline document “Corporate Policy Groups and Strategic Policy Committees - Guidelines for Establishment and Operation – June 2014” shall be applied by Leitrim County Council.

- 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.

In relation to membership of SPCs by Elected Members, those now to be appointed under the SPC Scheme should remain in office for the remaining period of the present Council, i.e. up to date of ordinary day of retirement after the next local election, unless they earlier die, resign or are removed from office.

Each Councillor will sit on one SPC and will be asked to express a preference for the SPC on which they would like to serve. In the event that any particular SPC is oversubscribed and agreement cannot otherwise be reached, the final allocation of seats will be a matter for the Corporate Policy Group (CPG).

Leitrim County Council respects the requirements for Gender Balance in relation to the formulation of the Strategic Policy Committees and in so far as possible will ensure that this occurs in the nomination of members of the Council to the SPCs.

Appointment of Sectoral Representation to SPC's

Each SPC must have at least one-third of its membership drawn from external bodies. In accordance with the Guidelines for establishment and operation of Corporate Policy Groups and Strategic Policy Committees, 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;

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.

- 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.

At a minimum 6 and where appropriate, 7 sectors should be represented in each local authority's SPC configuration as follows:-

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

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 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. (For national pillar contacts, see **Appendix 1**). 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, 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.

The selected members should, be representative of local organisations active in County Leitrim as it is the local perspective of the respective pillar that the members would be expected to bring to the SPCs.

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.

While every effort is made to accommodate the preferences of Sectoral Representatives with regard to which SPC they are included on, having regard to the degree of interest

expressed for particular SPC's, the limited number of places available and the need to have balanced representation across SPCs, the final decision as to the sectoral make-up of each SPC rests with Leitrim County Council.

It is desirable that Sectoral nominees retain membership for the life of the Council. It will however, be open to each nominating sector to de-select its nominee if it is felt necessary, and notify the Council accordingly whereupon that 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 shall likewise be filled by the relevant sector. Appointments in these circumstances remain a reserved function of the Council.

Where a PPN vacancy arises, the Local Authority will notify the PPN Secretariat as request 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 there the vacancy has arisen to choose a representative.

Assignment of Sectoral Representation (4 seats per SPC)

The assignment of Sectoral Representation to the three SPCs to be established is detailed in the following table-

SPC	Membership	Sectoral Representation (& Nominating Body)
Economic Development, Enterprise and Planning	9 members – 6 Elected Members 4 Sectoral Representatives	- Business/Commercial (National Pillar) - Development/Construction (National Pillar) - Environmental/Conservation (Environmental Pillar and associated Environmental College under PPN arrangements) - Social Enterprise (PPN)

SPC	Membership	Sectoral Representation (& Nominating Body)
Housing Policy Social and Cultural Development	9 members – 6 Elected Members 4 Sectoral Representatives	- Social Inclusion (PPN) - Community/Voluntary (PPN) - Voluntary Housing Sector - Creative Industries Network

SPC	Membership	Sectoral Representation (& Nominating Body)
Environmental, Transportation and Infrastructural Policy	9 members – 6 Elected Members 4 Sectoral Representatives	- Agriculture/Farming (National Pillar) - Environmental/Conservation (Environmental Pillar and associated Environmental College under PPN arrangements) - Trade Union (National Pillar) - Business/Commercial (National Pillar)

Adoption of SPC Scheme

This draft SPC Scheme when approved by Leitrim County Council will be placed on public display for a minimum period of one month to allow for the making of submissions on the draft scheme. All sectoral organisations involved in the previous SPCs will be informed and invited to make comments in relation to same.

Following adoption by Leitrim County Council of the new SPC scheme, with or without amendment, nominations will be sought for representatives to the SPCs. In the case of the National Key Stakeholder Pillars (i.e. Business/Employers Pillar, Trade Union Pillar, Farming/Agricultural Pillar and Environmental Pillar), Leitrim County Council will write to the contact persons enclosing the adopted scheme and seek the nominations of those pillars for their particular SPCs as outlined in the adopted scheme. In addition 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.

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.

One month will be allowed for receipt of all nominations by Leitrim County Council.

Nomination forms must be submitted to the undersigned before <<*date to be inserted*>>

***Senior Executive Officer
Housing & Corporate Services
Leitrim County Council
Áras an Chontae
Carrick-on-Shannon
Co. Leitrim***

Appendix 1

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