



Galway City Community Network
Lionra Pobail Chathair Na Gaillimhe

Galway City Community Network CLG

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Galway City Community Network, The Public Participation Network in Galway City

Department of Rural and Community Development: Statement of Strategy

GCCN Submission

October 2020

Preface

Established in 2014, **Galway City Community Network (GCCN)** is the Public Participation Network in Galway City. It represents groups and organisations in the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in Galway City. The twin objectives that GCCN pursues are to:

- Advance the values of sustainability, equality, culture, community, empowerment and inclusivity and embed these in the policies, programmes and practice of local government, state organisations, national government and civil society.
- Develop and implement progressive models of and approaches to representation, participation and engagement for civil society in informing and shaping policy development and implementation.

Submission to the DRCD Statement of Strategy

GCCN welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the DRCD Statement of Strategy.

Our ability to deliver programmes and policy interventions efficiently and effectively for rural Ireland and communities

The range of programmes and interventions that are available is an acknowledgement that inequalities persist, and the social and economic benefits are not dispersed evenly throughout society. The work of the public participation networks needs to be supported by a strong community work infrastructure supporting and empowering communities so that they can engage with the PPN and local democratic processes. This infrastructure has been deeply affected by cuts and policy changes. GCCN acknowledges and supports the commitments in *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector* to support autonomous community work and further acknowledges the recent commitment in Budget 2021. This needs to be a starting point to support the most marginalised communities to address the issues affecting them and to deepen their engagement with decision-making and policy-making structures.

GCCN firmly believes that Public Participation Networks work best when they are independent of the local authority. Our independent status has enabled us to focus on and respond to the priorities as set by the GCCN membership and the Secretariat while working collaboratively with other organisations and groups, including the local authority, with which we have a number of joint initiatives. This independence must be maintained and the choice to become independent should be provided to others PPNs.

Ways in which our existing supports and funding can be directed to best support communities, particularly in respect of the emerging challenges of Brexit, Climate Action and Covid-19

GCCN was an active member of the Community Response Forum in Galway City, supporting the identification and development of referral pathways, convening an NGO Forum to identify the issues emerging for marginalised groups and supporting Galway City Council to develop the interactive map of services. This collaborative approach needs to be maintained and have the ability to increase its capacity to respond to needs as restriction levels increase.

The focus on volunteering during the initial stages of the response to the pandemic was appropriate for that time. However, the focus now needs to shift to a model that supports local community organisations to formulate community work, professional responses that are based on best practice and are more sustainable.

GCCN has an active Environment Linkage Group, from which the Galway Environmental Network emerged, and climate change is a significant concern for the network. GCCN urges the Department to action Object 11 in *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities*. Further, GCCN supports the DRCD intention to embed this area of work in the Local Economic and Community Planning process but would caution that pressure needs to be put on the local authority to *meaningfully* engage with this ambition.

Support for community, social enterprises and cooperatives that address local needs, stimulate the local economy and offer quality employment to marginalised communities is crucial in addressing the emerging challenges, including economic instability, caused by Brexit.

New policy and/or programme opportunities for the Department to consider as part of the 2021-2023 Strategy

Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities is a critical strategy for the community sector, the voluntary sector and the environmental sectors where that latter overlaps with the other two, setting out an ambition for the sectors and for the achievement of a range of objectives. It is imperative that the department prioritise the strategy, formulating new policies and programmes where appropriate to ensure its full implementation.

The Local Economic and Community Plan and the process involved in developing and implementing the plan has enormous potential. However, the GCCN experience suggests that this potential is not being reached. There is a need to ensure that there is an imperative on all state agencies to engage meaningfully with the plan and to support and resource its implementation. GCCN also suggests that a budget to support co-ordination and implementation should be made available, similar to the model employed by Healthy Ireland.

GCCN has worked with Galway City Partnership and Galway City Council on a number of initiatives to embed the Public Sector Duty in Galway City and to provide support to public bodies to engage with the duty. GCCN suggests that the Department of Rural and Community Development should demonstrate its commitment to the Public Sector Duty by ensuring that all its strategies, including the Statement of Strategy, are subject to the PSD. In addition, the department needs to implement the commitment of Objective 6 in *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities* to support implementation at local level in a coherent way.

The Sustainable Development Goals have the potential to provide a framework linking social, economic and environmental concerns. However, Ireland is failing the potential of the SDGs with much of the work cosmetic and superficial. GCCN urges DRCD to prioritise Objective 8 in *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities*, and support *meaningful* engagement with the SDGs.