



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

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## PPN Structural Review

## GCCN Submission

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## Preface

Established in 2014, **Galway City Community Network** (GCCN) is the Public Participation Network in Galway City. It represents over 150 groups and organisations in the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in Galway City.

The aim of Galway City Community Network is to co-ordinate and support the representation of the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in Galway City.

The role of Galway City Community Network is:

- To act as a platform for the groups/organisations engaged in the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in Galway City to develop policy and positions on issues of common concern to the sectors and to communities and to advocate for these policies and positions to be implemented.
- To facilitate the representation of the community, voluntary and environmental sectors on the Local Community Development Committee, the Strategic Policy Committees, the Joint Policing Committee, other local government and local development bodies and any local, regional, national or international body deemed appropriate by the Galway City Community Network.
- To contribute to the development and achievement of a vision for the well-being of this and future generations.

## Submission

Galway City Community Network welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the PPN Structural Review. This submission is being made on behalf of GCCN, the Public Participation Network for Galway City, GCCN Secretariat and the wider GCCN membership who were consulted with in the formulation of this submission.

## Governance & Structure

### Challenges

The most significant challenge for PPNs in relation to structure is that the purpose and role of the PPNs is not recognised by Local Authorities and Government Departments. As a result, PPNs cannot fulfil their role and purpose as networks of community, voluntary and environmental organisations and groups, that develop and implement progressive models of and approaches to representation, participation and engagement for civil society in informing and shaping policy development and implementation. There is a lack of proactive engagement by both Local Authorities and Government Departments in relation to consultations when PPNs should be their first port of call. There is significant resistance by Local Authorities to PPNs efforts to influence policy. There is also a lack of understanding of meaningful collaboration which is necessary for PPNs to fulfil their role.

It is vital that PPNs are fully independent of local authorities to ensure the appropriate functioning. 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. Being independent supports PPNs' ability to challenge and constructively engage with Local Authorities on relevant issues. This independence must be maintained and the choice to become independent should be provided to others PPNs.

### **Opportunities**

- Being independent supports PPNs' ability to challenge and constructively engage with Local Authorities on relevant issues. This independence must be maintained and the choice to become independent should be provided to others PPNs.
- That PPNs purpose is recognised by Local Authorities and Government Departments.
- That PPNs are engaged as a key stakeholder by Local Authorities and Government Departments.
- That PPNs are supported to create structures that are inclusive and facilitate equal participation rather than the imposition of a one-size-fits-all approach. Support for PPNs to use their own expertise to ensure democratic structures which challenge any power imbalances.
- An institutional shift within Local Authorities to accept the role of the PPN as equal partners and to welcome engagement with a diversity of voices from the voluntary, community and environmental sectors.
- Development of constructive working relationships between PPNs and all departments in Local Authorities (rather than just the Community Section) which facilitate meaningful collaboration.

## **Resources & Skills**

### **Challenges**

- Training is required across all departments in the Local Authority for staff and Councillors in relation to the role of the PPNs.
- As PPNs are not recognised as key stakeholders the expertise of PPNs and their member groups are not recognised. Local knowledge and lived experience.
- A lack of clarity on the role of Social Justice Ireland in relation to support for PPNs.

### **Opportunities**

- A training programme for all departments in the Local Authority for staff and Councillors in relation to the role of the PPNs.
- Recognition of the expertise of PPNs and their member groups in relation to local knowledge, lived experience and expert knowledge.
- Staff need to have the relevant skills and experience for their roles. Resource Workers need a background in the Community and Voluntary sector to be able to carry out their role. Resource Workers need to be drawn from areas that are independent from the Local Authority as opposed to being on secondment.
- The delivery of training to member groups should be budgeted for in the allocation of funding to PPNs.

- That PPNs can participate in the development of the workplan for the PPN support organisation which is responsive to the varied needs of PPNs.
- An increase in core funding to support the PPNs to fulfil their role.

## Participation, Engagement & Inclusion

### Challenges

- Lack of recognition of communities' right to participation and that communities are best placed to come up with solutions to issues which effect their lives.
- Participation by PPNs is often not welcomed by Local Authorities as there are irreconcilable differences in relation to policy.
- Community representatives are not treated as equal partners on structures such as SPCs and are prevented from meaningful fulfilling their role in relation to the formulation, development and review of policy.
- There is a lack of understanding of meaningful participation and collaboration on the part of the Local Authority.
- Lack of outcomes from engaging in consultation processes. PPN's develop frequent submission however there is rarely feedback on these submissions or evidence that the submissions have an impact on policy or planning.
- No mechanism to measure if there has been meaningful change or progress across plans and strategies for example LECPs and Development Plans.
- Relationships between government departments, Local Authorities and PPNs need to be improved.
- When issues arise, their resolution is not in a timely manner; for example, the length of time the mediation process between GCCN and GCC took.
- There is a lack of awareness by organisations and the general public about the role of PPNs.

### Opportunities

- That community representatives are recognised as equal partners in practice on structures such as SPCs and that the current power imbalances are addressed.
- Recognition that communities must be involved and participate meaningfully in decision-making processes that affect their lives. See OHCHR's '*Guidelines for States on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs*'<sup>1</sup> which calls for an 'Institutional framework to ensure participation in the decision-making of public authorities' with structures and mechanisms that 'provide meaningful opportunities for participation, they should, at minimum: (a) Be co-designed with relevant rights-holders; (b) Impartially channel the views of the rights holders concerned into actual decision-making processes; (c) Be provided with an adequate budget and human resources with expertise on the different groups for which participation needs

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<sup>1</sup> The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights), '*Guidelines for States on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs*': [GuidelinesRightParticipatePublicAffairs\\_web.pdf \(ohchr.org\)](https://www.ohchr.org/documents/E/huridocda/huridoca13_1_en.pdf)

to be encouraged and enabled; (d) Be accessible, inclusive, gender-responsive and representative’.

- That local authorities and departments develop meaningful collaborations with PPNs. Collaboration as defined as; a process of participation through which people, groups, and organisations work together to achieve desired results. Collaborations accomplish shared vision, achieve positive outcomes for the communities they serve, and build an interdependent system to address issues and opportunities. Collaborations also involve the sharing of resources and responsibilities to jointly plan, implement and evaluate programme to achieve common goals. Members of the collaboration must be willing to share vision, mission, power, resources and goals.<sup>2</sup>
- That Local Authorities and departments utilise community planning processes which include the voices of communities such as Planning for Real. The process allows residents to register their views on a range of issues, to work together to identify priorities, and in partnership with local agencies go on to develop an action plan for change.<sup>3</sup>
- That the successful implementation of plans and strategies are monitored and evaluated through the development of measurable targets.
- DRCD to implement the commitment of Objective 6 in *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities* to support implementation of the Public Sector Duty at local level in a coherent way.
- That Local Authorities are compelled to undertake an equality assessment and a review of their implementation of the Public Sector Duty.
- That national legislation is fully implemented at a local level and there is an oversight structure at a national level.
- The establishment of deliberative dialogue spaces.
- That best practice in terms of stakeholder and community engagement is implemented as outlined in the GCCN resource ‘Guidelines for Successful Community Engagement’.<sup>4</sup>
- That a consultative approach is adopted at local and national level. See the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, Tool for a Consultative Approach<sup>5</sup>
  - Appropriate – the approach pursued is suited to the particular task involved
  - Participative – the approach pursued is inclusive in engaging the voice of those most impacted particularly those experiencing marginalisation and inequality
  - Accountable – the approach pursued is open and transparent
  - Enabling – the approach pursued support the effective participation by stakeholders
  - Accessible – the approach pursued involves identifying and addressing barriers to participation that arise for stakeholders

## Climate Action

### Challenges

As highlighted during the focus groups the implementation of Climate Action initiatives is not a specific part of the PPNs’ role. GCCN has an active Environment Linkage Group, from which the Galway Environmental Network emerged, and climate change is a significant concern for the network.

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<sup>2</sup> [LearningCircleFiveResources \(cuny.edu\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [What is PFR? | Planning for Real](#)

<sup>4</sup> [GCCN, Guidelines for Successful Community Engagement](#)

<sup>5</sup> [IHREC-Tool-for-a-Consultative-Approach.pdf](#)

A significant challenge in this area is that Ireland continues to fail to meet its greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets. While micro-level, individual or community-based initiatives have a role to play in seeking to mitigate or adapt to the impacts of the climate changes and biodiversity crises, the State needs to ensure emphasis on the macro-level, ensuring fundamental changes in how the country deals with climate change. The Climate Conversation initiative<sup>6</sup> was very much focused on the individual/micro community level when the main focus needs to be on structural, high level, change.

Climate justice needs to be the framework for action on climate in recognition of the fact that the impact of climate change falls most heavily on those that have done the least to cause it and have the least resources to respond. Marginalised communities, struggling with fuel poverty, increasing food poverty and likely to live in communities most affected by air pollution, must be supported to make a just transition.

## Opportunities

- A new model of planning needs to be identified that recognises that there are climate and biodiversity emergencies as a starting point, is based on achieving the emission reduction targets in the Programme for Government of an average 7% per annum, year on year to 2030 and is centred around the needs of residents and facilitating them to live in a sustainable way.
- There is a wealth of community initiatives across country that contribute to climate action and use an environmental justice framework to respond to the climate and biodiversity crises. Communities have self-organised to develop local solutions. However, the most significant barrier faced by communities in implementing and advocating for these solutions is the lack of institutional support and facilitative policy and practice at a local and national level.
- Full implementation of Objective 11 in *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities*: Support community development and local development to engage with Climate Change adaptation and mitigation strategies.
- Full implementation of Objective 8 in *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities*, and support *meaningful* engagement with the SDGs.
- Climate Action must be meaningfully embedded in LECs and Development Plans.

## Community Development

### Challenges

As highlighted at the focus groups Community Development is not a theme but a professional practice undertaken by trained community workers. All Ireland Standards for Community Work define community work/development as, “A developmental activity comprised of both a task and a process. The task is social change to achieve equality, social justice and human rights, and the process is the application of principles of participation, empowerment and collective decision making in a structured and co-ordinated way”<sup>7</sup>. This work has five core values: 1. Collectivity; 2. Community Empowerment; 3.

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<sup>6</sup> [Climate-Conversation-GCCN-Report.pdf \(galwaycitycommunitynetwork.ie\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [AIEB, National Standards for Community Work.indd \(cwi.ie\)](#)

Social Justice and Sustainable Development; 4. Human Rights, Equality and Anti-discrimination; and 5. Participation.

GCCN believes that there has been a conflation of 'activities that happen in a community' being classified as community development as part of this consultation process. This is very concerning and not in keeping with the All Ireland Standards for Community Work or the DRCD's *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities*. Community work should be undertaken by community development organisation and by trained professional community workers. Community Development is not an add on to PPN's roles.

## Opportunities

GCCN has adopted community development as an underpinning approach to all its work. GCCN believes that these core values should underpin all community engagement and decision making structures and processes at all levels. GCCN believes that in order for this vision to be realised, strong community development, voluntary and environmental sectors are required, appropriately supported by the state and its agencies.

GCCN is particularly concerned with the promotion of meaningful and effective participation of communities in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. GCCN is deeply committed to the principles of participation, representation and consultation as we believe that:

- it is the right of people to participate in decisions and policies that affect them and their communities;
- the participation of people and communities benefit and improve decision-making and policy development.

PPN's should be encouraged to utilise community work principles in their work however this work should not be conflated with the developmental activity which is defined as community work/development. As a result GCCN believes Resource Workers need a background in the Community and Voluntary sector to be able to carry out their role.

## Closing Comments

There is concern in relation to the transparency of the consultation process. Community representatives were told that the report developed from the consultation process will not be circulated to participants before it is submitted to the Department. People who have participated in the process do not have an opportunity to see a draft to ensure their views were correctly and fairly interpreted and communicated. The report also may not be published and made publicly available. The Department had also communicated that there would be further focus groups at a later stage in the process in which community representatives would be able to participate but at a focus group it was then said this would not be the case and the first round of focus groups would be the only opportunity to engage in the process.

We also include GCCN's recommendation for the definition of the purpose of PPNs;

- To act as a platform for the groups/organisations engaged in the community, voluntary and environmental sectors;
- To develop policy and positions on issues of common concern to the sectors and to communities and to advocate for these policies and positions to be implemented;
- To facilitate the representation of the community, voluntary and environmental sectors on the Local Community Development Committee, the Strategic Policy Committees, the Joint Policing Committee, other local government and local development bodies and any local, regional, national or international body deemed appropriate
- To contribute to the development and achievement of a vision for the well-being of this and future generations.