

# **WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL**

**Comhairle Chontae Chill Mhantain**



## **STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE SCHEME**

**2024 - 2029**

**Adopted by Wicklow County Council  
On XXXXXXXXX**

## 1 Introduction

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, 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 relates to the functions of the Local Authority and advise the authority on those matters'*.

## 2 Policy Development and Governance Structure

Wicklow County Council's Corporate Plan sets out the objectives and supporting strategies that provide the framework within which policies will be considered and developed by the elected members through the policy development framework of the Council.



The policy development structure, comprises the elected members of the plenary Council, the Corporate Policy Group and the Strategic Policy

Committees, provide a governance structure to develop and monitor the effectiveness of policy development within the Council



### **3 The role of the Elected Members of Wicklow County Council**

The principal role of the elected member is to determine by resolution the policy of the local authority subject to and in accordance with the Local Government Act, 2001 as amended, and any other enactments relating to the local authority. The primary of the elected members is expressed in 'reserved' functions, set out in statute. The Elected Members is supported by the Chief Executive of the Council and Council officials.

### **4 Role of the Corporate Policy Group**

The CPG fulfils a strategic role linking and co-ordinating the work of the different SPCs and must be consulted in the preparation of the corporate Plan. The Chief Executive supports the work of the CPG.

It is the role of the Corporate Policy Group to consider the following matters:

- I. Preparation of the annual budget
- II. 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
- III. Determining whether a function will be discharged at the municipal district or local authority level, where reference in relation to the question is made to it.

- IV. Monitor the overall performance of the Council, including in relation to matters of governance and oversight, in particular through consideration of reports of the Audit Committee, Local Government Auditor and National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) and in accordance with the Local Government code of Governance
- V. Deal with overall issues in relation to service delivery plans, customer service, value for money etc (individual SPCs will deal with such issues in their work in so far as their particular service remit was concerned)
- VI. Approve the work programmes of the SPCs and monitor their achievement
- VII. Co-ordinate the work of the SPCs
- VIII. Request SPCs to consider particular policy issues, where appropriate and
- IX. Provide feedback to the SPCs on council policy and views in rearea relevant to the SPCs.

The Cathaoirleach reports to the full Council on the work of the CPG and should also report to the Council on the work (including proposals) of the SPC on a quarterly basis (although this may be more frequent depending on circumstances). The Chairs of each SPC report back to their respective committees similarly, as do the representatives of each municipal district to their fellow municipal district members.

Minutes of CPG meetings to be circulated to all elected members once confirmed by the CPG

## **5 Role of the Strategic Policy Committees**

Strategic Policy committees enable elected members to fulfil their role as policy-makers by providing a focus for their input into policy formation, opportunities for partnership with local interests and strengthening their role as leaders of their authority and the local community.

SPCs have a major role in assisting and advising the Council in relation to functions of a strategic statutory nature. They consider and advise the Corporate Policy Group and the full Council on matters connected with the formulation, development, monitoring and review of policy which relate to the functions of the Local Authority and are linked to the Corporate Plan. In their work SPCs are not concerned with individual representational or operational issues.

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.

SPCs will meet at least quarterly or as frequently as is considered necessary by the SPC Members in order to deliver the Annual Work programme.

## **6 Structure of the Strategic Policy Committees**

The membership of the CPG comprises the –

- Cathaoirleach
- Leas Cathaoirleach of the Council (for continuity purposes)
- Chairpersons of each SPC and
- Where a municipal district is not already represented, a 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).

The Strategic Policy Committees are to be established in a way that:-

- Reflects the major functions or service of the local authority
- Are tailored to the size, membership and administrative resources of the local authority
- Have membership drawn from sectors relevant to the committee's work
- SPC Chairs must hold office for a minimum of three years which could be renewed by the Council.
- A Director of Services will attend meetings and provide support for each SPC.

## 7 Number of SPCs

In the term of this Council (2024 to 2029) there will be 6 Strategic Policy Committees which will have responsibility as follows (this may change following the annual meeting)

1. Housing
2. Economic Development & Enterprise Support
3. Community and Social Development
4. Transportation Infrastructure delivery and Emergency Services
5. Climate Action, Biodiversity, Environment, Energy, Marine, Recreation and Amenity
6. Planning and Rural Development

	<b>Name of SPC</b>	<b>Areas of responsibility</b>
1	Housing	Social Housing and delivery supports Housing developments Homeless strategy Estate Management Traveller accommodation Programme
2	Economic development and	Implementation of Plans and Strategies such

	enterprise support	as the Local Economic and community Plan, Tourism Strategy, Skills Strategy, Film and food. Local Enterprise Office .
3	Community and social development	Community and social Development Including new communities, Leader and the Local Economic and community Plan. Strategies: Age Friendly and Disability & Inclusion Local Community Safety Partnership Social inclusion and community activation programme.
4	Transportation Infrastructure delivery and Emergency services	Infrastructure delivery, Roads and Transport. Emergency service, Fire Service
5	Climate Action, Biodiversity Environment, Energy, Marine, recreation and Amenity	Implementation of Climate Action Strategy and Biodiversity Plan – other plans and strategies with climate action and biodiversity goals and objectives such as the LECP – Environmental matters and recreation and amenity including Arts and Libraries
6	Planning and Rural Development	Wicklow County Development Plan, local area plans, URDF and Town Regeneration/place making. Heritage and conservation,

## 8 Cathaoirligh - Chairs

The SPC Cathaoirligh play a pivotal role of ensuring the success of the CPG and the SPCs. In that context, and to facilitate the smooth and effective

operation of the SPCs and the CPG (Corporate Policy Group 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

The SPC Chairs were appointed by the Elected Members of Wicklow County Council at their annual meeting held on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2024. These chairs must hold office for a minimum period of 2.5 years.

Meetings of SPC's will normally be held on a quarterly basis and will be conducted in a much less rigid and formal way than full council meetings in order to create an informal and collaborative atmosphere that will allow honest views and opinions on policy issues.

Where agreement is reached on recommendations of an SPC to be made to the full Council the Cathaoirleach of the SPC "or his/her nominee" shall present the SPC's recommendation to full Council. The outcome of the Council's consideration of the SPC's recommendation should likewise be reported back to the SPC.

## **9 Membership – Nomination process**

**Elected Members:** Wicklow County Council at its Annual meeting following the local elections on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 2024 appointed six chairs designate of Strategic Policy committees. The Council Members will nominate elected members to the Strategic Policy Committees and this membership will reflect the proportionality and the distribution of elected representation on the full Council as required. Under this scheme each elected members will become a member of at least one SPC.



## **Sectoral Representation**

The Council will facilitate the nominations in accordance with national guidelines (Corporate Policy Groups and Strategic Policy Committee revised guidelines for establishment and operation June 2024 from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and Circular Letter LG 09/2024 dated the 7<sup>th</sup> of June, 2024). The overall configuration is set out at appendix 1.

Nominations will be sought as set out below:-

- I. The nomination process for the agricultural/farming section will be facilitated by the farming and agricultural organisations pillar
- II. The business/commercial and development/construction sectors will be facilitated by the business and employers organisations pillar.
- III. The trade union sector will be facilitated by the trade union pillar
- IV. The environmental/conservation sector will be facilitated by the environmental pillar and the associated Environmental College under the PPN arrangements. To join the Environmental Electoral College under 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.
- V. The environmental/conservation, community/voluntary and social inclusion sectors will be determined on the basis of the local nomination process through the PPN
- VI. Members organisations when joining the PPN at a county level must opt to be part of one of three electoral colleges within the PPN i.e. Environment, Social Inclusion and Community/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.

Membership of the SPCs (both elected members and sectoral representatives) shall be for the lifetime of the Council and casual vacancies which arise will be filled by the relevant sector involved.

Nominating bodies are to bear in mind the objective gender balance in the making of appointments, as well as the need to foster social inclusiveness and equality when selecting their representatives. Nominating bodies may also de-select their nominees.

Once adopted each sector will be circulated with a copy of the scheme and given a period of 4 weeks from the date of the agreement to make nominations. Wicklow County Council will approve the new members of the Strategic Policy Committees on receipt of completed nominations by the next available Council meeting.

## **10 The SPC work programme**

- I. Each SPC will adopt a multi-annual work programme linked to Wicklow County Council's Corporate Plan and updated regularly as necessary.
- II. The CPG supported by the Chief Executive should approve the work programmes of the SPCs and may, as appropriate recommend issues to be considered by the SPCs. A review of SPC work programmes should be carried out by the CPG in the third year of the Council's term.
- III. SPC Members should be fully involved in the process of preparing the SPC work programmes which should begin once the policy parameters of each SPC having been drawn up, the SPC scheme agreed and the SPCs membership having been determined.

- IV. All SPC members should have the opportunity to contribute to the preparation of the work programme. The work programme to be linked to the Corporate Plan.

## **11 Meetings and operational procedures**

- I. **Quorum** – The quorum for the SPC shall be five members. If after 30 minutes from the agreed starting time of the meeting, a quorum is not present the meeting shall stand adjourned to a date to be determined by the Chair of the SPC .
- II. The SPC chair and relevant Director of Service should meet well in advance of an SPC meeting to formulate the agenda for the forthcoming meeting and to agree on objectives and desired expected outcomes. In addition members of the SPC can be involved in drawing up the agenda in a timely manner.
- III. 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. This should be structured in such a way as to fit in with policy making timeframes, including statutory timeframes to allow SPCs to perform their role.
- IV. 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.
- V. Local Authorities should ensure that documentation concerning SPC meetings is sent well in advance of the meetings and if possible two to three weeks in advance is suggested.

- VI. The agenda and minutes of SPC meetings should also be circulated well in advance to all SPC members.
- VII. 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.
- VIII. The Chief Executive can assist and advise the SPC generally as regards the exercise of the performance of the functions of the SPC through the SPC Chair and the relevant Director of Services.
- IX. 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 CPG meeting.
- X. SPC chairs with support of the Director of Services will introduce SPC recommendations for approval by full council once considered by the CPG
- XI. Where an SPC Policy recommendation, once approved, gives rise to financial implications it can only become operational once an appropriate supporting budget is in place.
- XII. The SPCs sectoral representatives should provide feedback to their nominating organisations on the activities of the SPC.
- XIII. Members of SPCs should be provided with automatic feedback on the outcome of the council's decisions on SPC recommendations.

## **12 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 ongoing 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.

## **Appendices**

The following appendices are attached:-

- SPC configuration is set out in appendix 1
- Principles applying in relation to the appointment of Members/Sector representatives are set out in Appendix 11 to this scheme.
- Information on the Regulation of Lobbying Act, 2014 and the Transparency Code is set out in Appendix 111 to this scheme.

## **APPENDIX I**

### **SPC configuration**

Each SPC should have as a minimum a total membership of nine. Each SPC must have at least one-third of the membership drawn from sectoral interests. At a minimum 6 and where appropriate 7 sectors should be represented in each local authority's SPC configuration these are:

- Agriculture /Farming
- Environmental / conservation
- Development/construction
- Business/commercial
- Trade Union
- Community / Voluntary
- Social inclusion

**The overall configuration of the Wicklow County Council Strategic Policy System is as follows:-**

	<b>SPC</b>	<b>Number of elected members</b>	<b>Membership from external sectors</b>
1	Housing <b>Chair – Cllr. Graham Richmond</b>	Chair and 6 elected members (7) Total members 12	1. Trade Union 2. Homeless sector (Simon Community) 3. Social Inclusion 4. Business commercial 5. Community/Voluntary
2	Economic development and enterprise support <b>Chair – Cllr. Tom Fortune</b>	Chair and 6 elected members (7) Total members 13	1. Development/construction 2. Agriculture Farming 3. Environment/Conservation 4. Business Commercial (Chambers) 5. Business West Wicklow 6. Trade Union
	Community and Social Development. <b>Chair – Cllr. Caroline Winstanley</b>	Chair and 6 elected members (7) Total members 12	1. Business Commercial 2. Community/Voluntary 3. Community/Voluntary 4. Social Inclusion 5. Environment conservation
4	Transportation Infrastructure delivery and Emergency services <b>Chair – Cllr. Stephen Stokes</b>	Chair and 6 elected members (7) Total members 12	1. Environment/conservation 2. Agriculture/Farming 3. Development/construction 4. Trade Union 5. Business and commercial
5	Climate Action, Biodiversity,	Chair and 6 elected members (7)	1. Environment/conservation (East Wicklow)

	Environment Energy, recreation and Amenity Chair – Cllr. Erika Doyle	Total members 13	2. Environment/conservation (West Wicklow) 3. Farming 4. Business/commercial 5. Development Construction <b>6.</b> An Comhairle Na Nog
6	Planning and Rural Development Chair – Cllr. Edward Timmins	Chair and 6 elected members (7) Total Members 11.	1. Development/construction 2. Agriculture/Farming 3. Environment/Conservation <b>4.</b> Business/Commercial



## **APPENDIX II**

### **Principles applying in relation to the appointment of Members/Sector representatives**

Each SPC should have a minimum as a minimum of total membership of nine with one third of the membership drawn from sectoral interests. Some flexibility could be considered if particular local circumstances indicate the need for greater membership, however, particular care should be taken to avoid excessively large or unwieldy committees.

The following principles apply to:

#### **(a) Appointment of Wicklow County Council Members**

1. Each Member of Wicklow County Council shall, as a matter of equity and good practice, have the opportunity to serve on at least one SPC.
2. Council Members may not be nominated to represent sectoral interests.
3. SPC Membership for Council Members shall be for the lifetime of the Council. A person ceasing to be an elected member shall automatically cease membership of the SPC.
4. Council Members shall not serve on more than two SPCs insofar as possible, again for reasons of equity and good practice and workload.
5. SPC Council membership shall reflect the proportionality and the local distribution of elected representation on the County Council.
6. The Chairs of the SPCs shall be appointed by the County Council from the Council Member appointees to the SPC for a minimum period of 3 years (this may change to 2.5 years at annual meeting as it has in the past).
7. The allocation of the SPC chairs shall also reflect equitably the spread of elected representation on the County Council.

## **Appointment of 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.

1. The agriculture / farming sector will be facilitated by the farming and agricultural organisations pillar
2. The business/commercial and development/construction sectors will be facilitated by the business and employers organisations pillar
3. The trade union sector will be facilitated by the trade union pillar
4. The environment/conservation, community / voluntary and social inclusion sectors will be determined on the basis of the local nomination process through the PPN.
5. The environmental/conservation sector will be facilitated by the environmental pillar and the associated Environmental College under the PPN arrangements.
6. Groups/Associations should be active within the area of the local authority and have a countywide impact or, at minimum, a relevance in a locality or number of localities in the area.
7. Groups/associations should be open to new members, hold AGMs, regular meetings, and should be broadly representative and accountable.
8. Single interest groups may be eligible e.g. campaign groups focused on disabled or elderly. Single issue groups should not be considered for inclusion in the sectors.
9. Local Development Agencies represented at Strategy Group/LCDC level should not be represented on an SPC.
10. Each sector shall select its own nominee(s) via PPN (Public Participation Network). The nomination of sectoral representatives is the sole responsibility of each particular sector. However the Council 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.

11. 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.
12. It is desirable that sectoral nominees would retain membership of the SPC for the life of the Council. It is open to each nominating sector to deselect its nominee, if considered necessary, and to notify the Council accordingly whereupon the person would cease to be a member. In such cases the relevant sector shall nominate a new representative.

## **APPENDIX 111**

### **REGULATION OF LOBBYING ACT 2015**

The Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 came into operation on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015. The Act is designed to provide information to the public about:-

- Who is lobbying
- On whose behalf is lobbying being carried out
- What are the issues involved in the lobbying
- What is the intended result of the lobbying
- Who is being lobbied

Councillors are designated public officials (DPOs) in accordance with the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015. Councillors should have regard to the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015.

#### **Exemption for certain types of working groups, committees etc.**

Lobbying is an essential part of the democratic process. Organisations such as interest groups, representatives bodies, industry, NGOs, charities and third party professional lobbyists all provide necessary input and feedback through communication of the views and concern of the public to government. It is intended that the work of these groups will contribute to the quality and effectiveness of the policy formulation process in the public interest. In light of the nature and frequency of communications between public officials and non-public servants in this type of forum, it would in practical terms be quite challenging to seek to capture and include those interaction in the Register of Lobbying.

The Act provides for an exemption from the requirement to register in such cases once specified transparency criteria apply. The particular exemption in the Act is for communications between members of certain types of such working groups, task forces, committees, etc. where the group in question complies with the Transparency Code.

### **Transparency Code – criteria which must apply to avail of the exemption under section 5(5)(n) of the Act.**

Relevant Groups must meet certain transparency criteria in order to be regarded as a 'relevant body' and to avail of the exemption set out in section 5(5)(n) of the Act. Information must be published on the Council Website setting out certain information in a prominent place and be easily accessible.

The SPCs of Wicklow County Council in their operations will comply with the Criteria set out in the Transparency Code prepared in accordance with the Regulation of Lobbying Act, 2015 which involves the publishing on the Council's website the following information:-

1. Name of the Chairperson together with details of his or her employing organisation
2. Names of Members together with details of their employing organisation
3. Whether any non-public servant members were previously designated public officials
4. Terms of reference of the group
5. Agenda of each meeting
6. Minutes of each meeting
7. Expected timeframe for the group to conclude its work
8. Reporting arrangements

More information is available on the Commission's website, [www.lobbying.ie](http://www.lobbying.ie).

End of scheme

1<sup>st</sup> July, 2024.