

## Draft Strategic Policy Committee Scheme 2024 - 2029

### 1. Introduction

Meath County Council is committed to enhancing the inclusiveness of local governance by promoting broader participation from community and sectoral groups. Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) bring together both elected members, and people actively working with social, economic, cultural and environmental bodies to develop and review policies related to the services provided by the Council. The statutory basis for Strategic Policy Committees is set out in Section 48 of the Local Government Act 2001 as amended by Section 41 of the 2014 Act. Meath County Council has operated Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) since 2002 and it is now proposed to re-establish such committees to create avenues for relevant external organisations to actively engage in the development of policies that will benefit all communities in County Meath.

#### 1.2 Role of Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs)

The role of the Strategic Policy Committees is to assist the Council in the formulation, development, monitoring and review of policy. These Committees enable the integration of expertise from external entities into the policy-making process. SPCs play a crucial role in ensuring that the major functions and services provided by the local authority are considered within a wider framework, thereby facilitating comprehensive and effective policy planning.

In accordance with Revised Guidelines for Establishment and Operation of Corporate Policy Groups and Strategic Policy Committees, there is a requirement that SPCs:

- Should meet a minimum of twice yearly or more often if required, at suitable times for all SPC Members, with a calendar of meetings to be agreed;
- Adopt a multi-annual work programme, linked to the local authority's Corporate Plan and updated regularly as necessary, to be approved by the CPG;
- Agree an annual work programme in accordance with the multi-annual work programme;
- Are tailored to the size, membership and administrative resources of the local authority;
- Have a minimum one third of their membership drawn from sectors relevant to the committee's work;
- SPC Chairs should hold office for a minimum of three years which could be renewed by the Council;
- A Director of Service will attend meetings and provide support for each SPC.

Each SPC is required to have regard to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies prepared by the Regional Assembly. Each SPC should also consider climate action impacts as part of any and all policies that form part of the work programme. SPCs can provide advice and assistance to the Council in the preparation of Annual Service Delivery Plans.

Pursuant to the provisions of Section 132 and 136 of the 2001 Act as amended by the 2014 Act, the Chief Executive is required to advise and assist the SPC generally as regards the performance of the functions of the SPC. Normally the SPC Chair will make arrangements with the relevant Director of Services to have this advice available for the relevant meeting of the SPC. In addition, in accordance with Section 147 (7) of the 2001 Act as inserted by Section 54 of the 2014 Act, the Chief Executive is required to have regard to the views of the elected members in the discharge of the executive functions of the council including as expressed at a meeting of the SPC.

Section 48(3A) of the 2001 Act (inserted by Section 41(d) of the 2014 Act) empowers an SPC to seek the attendance of public authorities at a meeting for the purpose of assisting it in developing policy. A request to a public authority to attend a meeting of a SPC should:

- set out the issue on which advice is being sought, including providing any policy papers of the local authority, or draft policy papers, and the linkages to the policy responsibility of the public authority;
- provide at least one month's notice, or shorter interval if mutually agreed.

The Act provides for the public authority to assist the SPC in the formulation of its policy by the SPC. The purpose of the provision is to give an additional resource in formulating policy and to strengthen linkages between local authorities and public bodies with wider responsibilities in the sectoral area in which the SPC operates. The invitation to attend a meeting of an SPC cannot be used to query the public authority in the performance of its functions or duties.

### 1.3 The Corporate Policy Group (CPG)

The Council has established a Corporate Policy Group (CPG), which will comprise the Cathaoirleach of Meath County Council, the SPC chairs and where a Municipal District is not already represented, a member of such Municipal District. The CPG is supported by the Chief Executive and Management Team and links the work of the different SPCs to provide a forum where policy positions affecting the Council can be agreed for submission to the full Council. The CPG will prepare a CPG Terms of Reference for adoption by the full Council. The Cathaoirleach reports to the full Council on the work of the CPG.

## 2. SPC Framework 2024 - 2029

### 2.1 Strategic Policy Committees and their Composition

Meath County Council will establish 6 Strategic Policy Committees with the following remits:

**Development Management, Forward Planning and Rural Development**

**Climate Action and Environment**

**Transportation**

**Housing**

**Community & Cultural Development and Gaeltacht Affairs**

**Economic Development & Enterprise, Tourism and EU Affairs**

Each Councillor shall sit on one SPC and shall not be appointed to represent sectoral interests.

The Council will appoint the Chairperson of each SPC who shall be ex-officio a member of that committee. The Chairperson will hold office for a minimum period of 3 years and the overall spread of SPC Chairs must, in accordance with the guidelines, reflect the political representational spread on the full Council.

The nominated preference of Councillors, as to which SPC they wish to serve on, will be accommodated in so far as practicable. In the event of any dispute and where agreement cannot otherwise be reached the final allocation of seats will be a matter for the Corporate Policy Group.

Membership of the SPCs (both Councillors and sectoral representatives) shall be for the duration of the current Council Term. Casual vacancies that arise will be filled by the sector involved and approved by the full Council. Nominating bodies may also de-select their nominees.

## 2. SPC Framework 2024 - 2029

### 2.1 Strategic Policy Committees and their Composition

Membership by Committee	Elected Members	Sectoral Interest	Total
Development Management, Forward Planning and Rural Development	6	3	9
Climate Action and Environment	6	3	9
Transportation	6	3	9
Housing	8	4	12
Community & Cultural Development and Gaeltacht Affairs	6	3	9
Economic Development & Enterprise, Tourism and EU Affairs	8	4	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>60</b>

### 2.2 Sectoral Representation and Nomination

The following sectors will provide representation on SPCs, where appropriate:

Agriculture / Farming  
Environment / Conservation  
Development / Construction  
Business / Commercial  
Trade Union  
Community / Voluntary  
Social Inclusion

The nomination process for the Agricultural/Farming, Business/Commercial, Development/Construction and the Trade Union sectors will be facilitated by the National Pillars. (national pillar contacts in Appendix 1).

The Environmental/Conservation sector will be facilitated by the Environmental Pillar and the associated Environmental College under the Public Participation Network (PPN) arrangements. The Environmental / Conservation, Community / Voluntary and Social Inclusion sectors will be determined on the basis of the local nomination process through the PPN in Meath.

Member Organisations when joining the PPN must opt to be a part of one of three electoral colleges within the PPN: Environment; Social Inclusion; or Community and Voluntary.

In seeking nominations, sectors will be asked to bear in mind the objective of achieving a 40% gender balance in the making of appointments, as well as the need to foster social inclusiveness and equality when selecting their representatives.

<b>Strategic Policy Committee</b>						
	<b>Development Management, Forward Planning and Rural Development</b>	<b>Climate Action and Environment</b>	<b>Transportation</b>	<b>Housing</b>	<b>Community &amp; Cultural Development and Gaeltacht Affairs</b>	<b>Economic Development &amp; Enterprise, Tourism and EU Affairs</b>
<b>Agriculture/ Farming</b>		1				1
<b>Environment/ Conservation</b>		1	1	1	1	
<b>Development/ Construction</b>	1					
<b>Business/ Commercial</b>	1		1		1	1
<b>Trade Union</b>						1
<b>Community/ Voluntary</b>		1	1	2	1	1
<b>Social Inclusion</b>	1			1		
<b>Total</b>	3	3	3	4	3	4

## 3. SPC Scheme Implementation

### 3.1 Public Consultation Process

The Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning Decision Making will inform the public consultation process. The views of former members of the SPCs have been sought, and responses received have been considered as part of the preparation of the draft SPC Scheme.

The draft SPC Scheme, when approved by Meath County Council, will be placed on public display for a period of one month to allow for the making of submissions on the draft scheme.

### 3.2 Adoption of SPC Scheme

Following adoption by Meath County Council of this SPC scheme, with or without amendment, nominations will be sought for representatives to the SPCs.

The Council will seek preferences from the Elected Members.

In the case of the National Key Stakeholder Pillars (i.e. Business/Employers Pillar, Trade Union Pillar, Farming/Agricultural Pillar and Environmental Pillar), Meath 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 above.

In addition, the Council 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 requesting the selection of their representatives for the SPCs as set out in this Scheme.

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

### 3.3 Principles of Appointing Members

In appointing Council members, the following principles will apply:

- Each County Councillor will serve on a minimum of 1 SPC
- Councillors may not be nominated to represent sectoral interests.
- SPC membership for Councillors will be for the lifetime of the Council. A member ceasing to be a Councillor would also cease membership of the SPC
- In the event of a Councillor resigning from an SPC the appointment of a replacement Councillor shall be decided by the full Council

- The proportionality of elected Councillors on each SPC will as far as is possible reflect that which prevails in the full Council.
- Each member 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 Council's Corporate Policy Group.

In appointing sectoral representatives, the following principles will apply:

- Groups / associations should be active within the county and have a countywide impact or at a minimum relevance within a locality or a number of localities in the area.
- Groups / associations should be open to new members, hold Annual General Meetings and regular meetings and should be broadly representative or accountable.
- Single interest groups may be considered e.g. groups focused on individuals with disabilities or older adults. Groups formed around specific local issues will not be considered for inclusion in the sectors.
- Each Sector is responsible for its own nominees. However Meath County Council recommends that as far as possible each nominee should have broad knowledge or experience related to the SPC to which they have been nominated.
- It is desirable that sectoral nominees would retain membership for the life of the Council. It is open to each nominating sector to deselect its nominee if felt necessary and to notify the Council accordingly whereupon the person would cease to be a member. In such cases the relevant sector will nominate a new representative for approval at the full Council.
- Where a casual vacancy occurs it will likewise be filled by the relevant sector and will be subject to approval by the full Council.
- While every effort will be made to accommodate preferences the final decision will rest with Meath County Council having regard to the likely degree of interest, the limited number of SPC places available and the need to have a balanced constituency for each SPC.

### 3.4 Administrative Structures

Each SPC will be supported by a Director of Service. Each SPC Chair will introduce SPC recommendations for approval by the full Council. The SPCs sectoral representatives are required to provide feedback to their nominating organisations on the activities of the SPC. Members of the SPCs will be provided with automatic feedback on the outcome of the council's decisions on SPC recommendations.

Standing Orders will be drafted to govern the operation of SPCs and, following approval by the CPG, shall be adopted by each SPC once approved. The Standing Orders will provide for inter alia, the code of conduct of members of SPCs as well as provisions for declarations of potential conflicts of interest. Each member of the SPC will be required to uphold the highest standards of ethics and should familiarise themselves with the provisions of the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 and GDPR.

The Council will facilitate mandatory induction training for all members of the SPC to include the following:

- Workshop on policies within the remit of the SPCs, including climate action.
- Briefings on the reform, role and functions of local government
- Legal and ethical responsibilities of SPC members, including but not limited to GDPR, lobbying, etc

Any other identified training needs will be considered in accordance with the Training Programme for Elected Members.

In general, any travel expenses arising in respect of attendance at SPC meetings should be met by the nominating body. However, in exceptional circumstances, where the nominating body is unable to pay such travel expenses, the Council will provide for payment of travel expenses in respect of attendance at SPC meetings. Expenses will be paid in accordance with the agreed Civil Service Motor Travel Rates. Any member claiming expenses will be required to provide an indemnity to Meath County Council on their motor car insurance policy.

## Appendix 1

### National Contact Points of Key Stakeholders

Pillar	Name & Address	Contact
Farming	Irish Farmers Association (IFA) Irish farm Centre Bluebell, Dublin 12	info@ifa.ie
Business	Chambers Ireland 22-24 Lower Mount Street Dublin 2	info@chambers.ie
Trade Unions	Deirdre Mannion Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) Head Office 31-32 Parnell Square Dublin 1	01 8897726 deirdre.mannion@ictu.ie
Environment	Irish Environmental Network Macro Community Resource Centre 1 Green Street, Dublin 7	01 8780116 office@ien.ie