



County Longford Public Participation Network

Submission to Longford County Council
Corporate Plan Review 2019-2024

October 2019

INTRODUCTION

County Longford Public Participation Network was established in 2015 as part of the Putting People First Strategy.

The aims of PPNs are to

- Facilitate the participation and representation of communities in a fair, equitable and transparent manner in decision making by encouraging and enabling public participation in local decision making and planning of services.
- Facilitate the selection of representatives from the environmental, social inclusion and voluntary sectors on to County decision making bodies.
- Support a process that feeds the broad range of ideas, experience, suggestions and proposals of the PPN into policies and plans being developed by agencies and decision makers.
- Strengthen the capacity of communities and of the environmental, social inclusion & voluntary groups to contribute positively to the community in which they reside/participate by actively supporting the inclusion of socially excluded groups, communities experiencing high levels of poverty, communities experiencing discrimination, including Travellers to enable them to participate at local and county level and to clearly demonstrate same.
- Sharing information relevant to the environmental, social inclusion & voluntary sector and acts as a hub around which information is distributed and received.

Currently there are 364 community groups across the three pillars affiliated to County Longford PPN, 149 in the Longford Municipal District, 98 in the Granard Municipal District and 117 in the Ballymahon Municipal District. The PPN has representatives on the following decision-making bodies in the county.

- Local Community Development Committee (LCDC): 5 Reps
- Sub Committees:
 - LEADER EVALUATION: 2 Reps
 - SICAP Monitoring Group: 2 Reps
- Strategic Policy Committee's (SPC's): 8 Reps requested. Deadline 24th October
 - Climate Action & Planning SPC – 1 C&V Rep
 - Place Making to include Economic SPC – 1 C&V, 1 Social Inclusion
 - Strategic Infrastructure SPC – 1 C&V Rep, 2 Environmental Reps
 - Governance SPC – 2 C&V
- Joint Policing Committee: 4 Rep
- URBACT Local Group: 5 Reps
- Older Persons Council: 2 Reps
- Longford Sports Partnership: 5 Reps

- County Heritage: 1 Rep
- Longford Volunteer Centre: 1 Rep
- County Longford Childcare Committee: 1 Rep
- County Longford Drug and Alcohol Forum/ Midlands Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force: 1 Rep
- Longford Community Resources Ltd: 2 Reps
- County Longford Tourism: 3 Reps

These are members of the community who give their time voluntarily to make County Longford a better place in which to live and work and bring up families. The PPN ensures these local community volunteers have a say in the local decisions that directly affect their lives

LONGFORD COUNTY COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN 2019 – 2024

County Longford PPN welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Longford County Council Corporate Plan review. The PPN held numerous consultations in relation to the development of Community Wellbeing Vision Statements (CWVS) 2018 and Election Mandates 2019 at municipal district level and county. These consultations gave us the opportunity to hear first-hand the issues that are facing the people of County Longford. Longford PPN was the first in the country to develop their CWVS. The Dept. recently issued a circular stating that all PPN's must develop CWVS and they are to be used to direct the work of the PPN. These visions also link to various LA Strategies.

PARTICIPATION, DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

The PPN is the main channel to inform community groups of the broad work LCC carries out. It is important that any decisions affecting a community or local area are communicated through the PPN.

As part of the reform of local government, the report from the Working Group on Citizenship Engagement stated: *'the approaches to engage citizens in local authority policy formulation and service design must go beyond the range of communication, consultation and citizen participation mechanisms used in the past'*.

Communities in all three municipal districts raised the following as issues/items that were important to them:

- Ongoing training and education on local and national government structures so they can make informed decisions at election time.
- That LCC plans are integrated and clearly responsive to local needs.
- There is an inclusive local democracy with support for the election of women, young people and people with disabilities.

- A well-resourced Public Participation Network (PPN) is the structure through which community groups can engage effectively with Local Authority.
- Local Authority staff contact details are easily accessible to the community.
- Every amenity is accessible to everyone (disability/new communities)
- Grant applications are announced in a timely fashion with criteria in a clear, understandable language.
- Elected Councillors communicate effectively with the communities in all towns and villages in their Municipal District.
- All council meetings are live streamed.
- Community membership on the four SPC's is increased to include a seat for each college i.e C&V, Social Inclusion and Environmental issues on each SPC totalling 12 seats for community representatives. This will also support LCC/ PPN to achieve gender balance.

VALUES, CULTURE and MEANING

PPN community groups highlighted the following as important items for LCC to consider when drafting their Corporate Plan;

- Longford Intercultural strategy is being implemented and monitored.
- Access to Arts programmes is widely available.
- Animal rights are understood and respected.
- Traditional skills and crafts are retained and promoted.
- Irish language, music, dance, sports and place names are promoted.
- Irish culture is retained as well as including cultures of new communities.

HOUSING

The lack of quality affordable housing is creating great hardship for many people in the county. An urgent priority is to increase the social housing stock in the county. LCC must strive to eliminate homelessness and overcrowding in the county.

We would ask LCC to investigate piloting a scheme in Longford where tenants can employ a contractor to carry out work to alleviate the long wait for window/door/damp repairs etc. Communities also raised the importance of all social housing having outdoor space.

Non-national communities have raised issues of private rented apartment buildings not having lights in hallways and main building doors broken. We ask LCC to carry out spot checks on buildings particularly in the Longford town area. Many families with small children live in these buildings and residents don't feel safe.

TOURISM

The arrival of Center Parcs has highlighted opportunities to increase the tourism revenue into the county. Community groups in Granard municipal district would like to develop the hospitality and tourism sector to a high standard to attract and accommodate visitors to the area.

Groups in the Ballymahon municipal district would like old heritage buildings in Ballymahon to be preserved and restored for community and tourism activities.

Groups in Longford want their municipal district to be a centre of employment and tourism opportunities for the whole county. We ask LCC to continue to develop our towns and to recognise the serious problem towns have with anti-social behaviour, drugs and feuding. Volunteers are working tirelessly to keep the county tidy, develop community projects and businesses to attract more people into the county.

DISABILITY

As a PPN we also hear first-hand from disability groups who are struggling due to a lack of funding and resources. We thank LCC for the great engagement with the PPN Disability so far (consultation on Longford Access Plan Jan 2019, respraying of disabled bays etc.) and we ask LCC to continue to add the development and maintenance of footpaths, traffic lights, tactile pavement and any other work that can be carried out to allow all citizens a quality of life that allows them to move safely and freely to shop, go to work, access all amenities, roads and streets while living independently.

SOCIAL INCLUSION / INTEGRATION

Longford PPN established the PPN Intercultural Forum March 2019 under the Longford County Council's Intercultural Strategy and we ask LCC to continue to work with the PPN on implementing the actions from this strategy. Currently we are supporting communities from India, Pakistan, Libya, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Brazil and the Philippine's.

Groups in all municipal districts are open to all cultures and welcome new members from different backgrounds.

Access to local transport was high on the agenda to combat isolation in all three municipal district with particular emphasis on the wellbeing of the elderly and those living with disabilities.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, all future development in Longford needs to ensure the maximum use of sustainable energy, reduction in carbon emissions and care for

our natural environment. Longford PPN recently launched their PPN Sustainable Education and Engagement Programme which will deliver workshops based in the 17 UN goals so communities can learn, enjoy and develop projects in their homes, work, schools and businesses.

ENVIRONMENT.

Longford PPN welcomes the establishment of the Climate Action and Planning SPC. We also ask LCC to look into increasing the percentage energy efficiency improvement target and reduce the date it is to happen by as this is an immediate problem. We ask LCC to encourage more environmentally sustainable methods of energy providing.

Other suggestions from the community include;

- Community driven Co-ops assisted by LCC
- Revisit the idea of community owned wind farms
- LCC to work with Bord na Mona to repurpose their plant in Lanesboro to prevent job losses and have an environmentally sustainable method of creating power there.
- Investigate the use of bogs with geothermal production of energy without disturbing biodiversity.
- Install solar panels on LCC buildings and increase incentives for private owners to do the same.
- Consult with younger representatives so their voices are heard e.g. Macra na Feirme, Comharile na nOg.
- Members of the public and environmental non-governmental organisations have the right to seek a review of decisions made which may affect the environment.
- There is active education and the community are informed and involved in protecting the natural environment.
- There are creative initiatives for renewable energy, waste management and resource use. (in households, farms, businesses, etc.)
- Towns and villages are well maintained with buildings re-used to fulfil community needs.
- County Longford is physically and digitally well-connected and integrated.
- Pollution of water bodies is prevented.

- There is an effective waste management plan promoted actively throughout the community with a process to address illegal dumping.
- Each town has adequate green space, community gardens, cycle tracks, playground and wildlife areas (to include native floral)
- Greenways, brownfield and heritage sites, woodlands, walkways and trails are developed and well maintained.
- Air pollution is reduced and flora and fauna are protected.
- Infrastructure and transport is solar powered reducing energy use

EDUCATION

As part of the LCC Corporate Plan review, the PPN asks LCC to continue to look in to bringing more third level education opportunities to the county to ensure that future generations have easy access to this level of education and can reside in their home area if they so wish to do so.

GENDER EQUALITY AND LOCAL DEMOCRACY

LCC has particularly poor gender balance at elected representative levels. The recent Local Elections, unfortunately, saw a decrease in female representatives. Such imbalances, therefore, impact on the composition of committees. There are no female councillors on the 4 SPC's so the PPN would ask LCC to correct this imbalance by adding additional community representatives.

CONCLUSION

The PPN was established as the main link between LCC and community groups in order to engage citizens more at local government level. The PPN to date has successfully engaged 364 groups around the county, set up 15 Linkage groups, facilitated the election of community representatives onto 17 decision making committees both council and outside agencies and delivered training to both community groups and Council employees.

As a PPN we are continually growing and expanding but there is a risk to sustaining this active, effective and efficient network. The risk being the heavy workload on the current full time LCC worker and temporary LCC support worker. We welcome the continued financial support from LCC. Longford PPN continues to earn the reputation both locally and nationally as being one of the lead networks and much of this is down to the successful relationship it has with LCC.

The PPN allows for a real opportunity to bring community groups together for the betterment of the county rather than working individually. The PPN's goal is to be the one stop shop where LCC and other agencies can come when seeking community representatives, consultations,

policy changes, reviews, a wide range of knowledge and experience while building relationships that enhance community spirit. The PPN is grateful for the support LCC has giving the network to date and looks forward to sharing continued success.