



# **Draft Scheme for the Establishment**

**of the**

## **Corporate Policy Group**

**and**

## **Strategic Policy Committees**

**July 2024**

## **BACKGROUND**

The Corporate Policy Group (CPG) and Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) system recognises that Elected Members should be engaged in the Council's policy formulation processes at an early stage. It also seeks to broaden the level of involvement in local government through the participation of a wide range of sectoral interests. The SPC structure was originally established following the 1999 local elections and the ***Government's Action Programme for Effective Local Government*** acknowledged the success of this system and envisages that these structures are reviewed and strengthened in the context of the reform of local government.

The statutory basis for the establishment of the CPG and SPCs is set out in the Local Government Act, 2001, as amended by the Local Government Reform Act 2014.

Following the 2024 Local Elections, it is necessary for each County and City Council to establish a new CPG and SPCs in line with Guidelines published by the Department of Environment Community and Local Government in June 2024 entitled: ***Corporate Policy Groups and Strategic Policy Committees, Revised Guidelines for Establishment and Operation.***

Public bodies are required to comply with the Transparency Code issued under the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 and Westmeath County Council's CPG and SPC's will comply with this code.

## **THE CORPORATE POLICY GROUP (CPG)**

The statutory basis for the CPG is set out in Section 133 of the Local Government Act 2001 as amended by Section 48 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014. The legislation and associated guidelines provide that:

The membership of the Corporate Policy Group shall consist of:

- (a) The Cathaoirleach of Westmeath County Council.
- (b) The chairpersons of each of the Strategic Policy Committees of the Council
- (c) Where a municipal district is not already represented on the CPG, a member of such municipal district.

The primary role of the CPG is to:

- a) Advise and assist the elected council in formulation, development, monitoring and review of policy
- b) Allocate business between Strategic Policy Committees
- c) Participate in consultation with the Chief Executive in respect of the Corporate Plan and the Annual Budget
- d) Promote co-ordination, consistency, effectiveness and avoidance of duplication in the performance of functions of the council by municipal district members.

The CPG should:

- a) 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
- b) determine responsibility for discharge of reserved functions as between the municipal district level (or a specific municipal district) and the local authority, where a question of consistency or avoidance of unnecessary duplication is referred to it by the Chief Executive

- c) monitor the overall performance of a local authority, including in relation to matters of governance and oversight, 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
- d) deal with overall issues in relation to service delivery plans, customer service, value for money, etc.
- e) approve the work programmes of the SPCs and monitor their achievement.
- f) co-ordinate the work of the SPCs
- g) request SPCs to consider particular policy issues; where appropriate; and
- h) provide feedback to the SPCs on council policy and views in areas relevant to the SPCs.

The CPG will be chaired by the Cathaoirleach of the Council and its work will be supported by the Chief Executive of the Council.

### **STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEES (SPCs)**

The statutory basis for the SPCs is set out in Section 48 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended by section 41 of the 2014 Act. The legislation and associated guidelines provide that:

The Membership of each SPC shall consist of:

- a) Elected Members of Westmeath County Council
- b) Sectoral Representatives

The sectoral representatives are people actively working with the social, economic, cultural, and environmental bodies in the county. They are therefore in a position to provide external views and input into Council policy.

While the full Elected Council is and remains the decision-making Authority, it is the task of the SPCs to consider matters connected with the formulation, development, monitoring and review of policy which relate to the functions of the local authority and to advise the authority on those matters.

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. Background work, discussion and recommendations will be completed and agreed at SPC level before final consideration and ratification by the Council. Each SPC will provide advice and reports to the Council on any policy matter within their range of responsibility or on related issues such as on annual service delivery plans. This may be on their own initiative, or on the request of the Council, or the CPG.

The SPC will be represented at Council meetings by the SPC Chair, who will normally present the outcome of SPC work to the full Council. Each SPC shall take account of the Council's overall corporate policy and objectives and be responsive to external consultation.

The work of the SPC shall be supported by the relevant Director of Services and his/her staff.

Appendix 1 indicates the CPG and SPC structure relative to the full Council, the Municipal Districts, and the Local Community Development Committee.

## **STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE (SPC) STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP**

It is proposed to set up 4 SPCs as follows:

1. Economic Development, Enterprise, Agriculture and Tourism.
2. Environment, Climate Action, Rural Water and Emergency Services.
3. Housing, Community and Culture.
4. Planning, Regeneration and Transportation.

Each SPC shall be composed of:

- 5 No. Elected Councillors and
- 4 No. Sectoral Representatives.

The SPC structure allows for each Elected Councillor to be a member of one SPC. The Chair and the Elected Members to sit on each SPC will be appointed by the Council. The Chair will hold office for a minimum period of 3 years which may be renewed by the Council.

Membership of the SPCs (both Elected Members and Sectoral Representatives) shall be for the lifetime of the Council. Casual vacancies which arise will be filled by the sector involved. Nominating bodies may also deselect their nominees.

A meeting between the full Council and the collective Sectoral Representatives may be held once a year at the request of the Council or the SPCs.

While every effort will be made to accommodate the preferences of Sectoral Representatives with regard to which SPC they are included on, the final decision as to the sectoral make-up of each SPC will rest with the Local Authority.

The proposed membership of each of the SPCs is set out in Appendix 2.

## **SECTORAL REPRESENTATION**

Each SPC must have at least one-third of its membership drawn from external bodies. It is envisaged that sectoral representation will provide relevant expertise and also foster local participation.

The Sectors which will be represented on the SPCs are as follows:

- a) Agriculture / Farming
- b) Business / Commercial
- c) Trade Union
- d) Development / Construction
- e) Public Participation Network
  - Community and Voluntary
  - Social Inclusion
  - Environmental / Conservation

The nomination process for Sectoral Representatives will be as follows:

- (a) (b) (c) and (d) – will be facilitated and agreed by the national organisation pillars.
- (e) will be facilitated through the Public Participation Network.

The following principles are to apply in the nomination process:

- Due regard will be given to those groups or county wide organisations who have specialist expertise in certain specific areas of interest e.g. services to marginalised and disadvantaged / youth activities, social housing.
- Each sector should select its own nominee.
- State and Local Development Agencies should not be included as nominating bodies to the sectors and should not be represented on the SPC.
- Nominations from the sectors should, insofar as possible, reflect an appropriate gender balance in line with Government Policy.
- Groups / associations should be active in the area of the Local Authority and must have a county wide impact, or, at a minimum, relevance in a locality or number of locations in the area.
- Groups should hold AGMs and regular meetings and should be broadly representative and accountable and should be open to new members. Groups should have a broad sectoral remit.
- Single issue groups may be considered, e.g. groups focused on the disabled or elderly. However, groups formed around single local issues should not be considered for inclusion in the sectors.

Each member of the SPC should be aware of their role in policy formulation and in this regard should consult with their nominating body to ensure that the broad views of their nominating body are considered in the deliberations of the SPC.

### **OPERATION OF STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEES**

In order to ensure the effective and efficient operation of the SPCs, the following general principles shall be implemented:

- SPCs should participate in the development of the Corporate Plan if required by the CPG.
- SPC's should adopt a multi-annual work programme linked to the Local Authority's Corporate Plan and also an annual work programme. The CPG should approve the work programmes of the SPC and may, as appropriate, recommend issues to be considered by the SPCs. These work programmes will be monitored by the CPG and a review of work programmes should be carried out by the CPG in the third year of the local authority electoral term.
- SPC members should begin the process of preparing the SPC work programme once the policy parameters of each SPC have been drawn up, the SPC scheme agreed and the membership of the SPC has been determined. Once a draft workplan has been drawn up the SPC membership should be allowed at least 4 weeks for their observations and comments. The finalised workplan will be submitted to the CPG for approval.
- The SPC agenda for each SPC meeting should be agreed between the Director of Service and the SPC Chair well in advance of the meeting. SPC meeting documentation should ideally be circulated to SPC Members, if possible, 2 weeks in advance of meetings.
- Any SPC Member wishing to have an issue of interest which is appropriate to the SPC considered at the next SPC meeting, can submit this issue to the Director of Service or Meeting Administrator at least 4 weeks in advance of the meeting.

- Attendance at SPC meetings will be monitored and any poor attendance record will be brought to the attention of the nominating body and the nominating body will be requested to review nomination and either, confirm that nominee can participate, or submit alternative nominee.
- It is proposed that each SPC meet at least 4 times per annum and in this regard an annual schedule of meetings including location and meeting time will be agreed by the members of the SPC.
- Standing Orders will be adopted at the initial meeting of each SPC.
- To facilitate the SPC in its policy making role, the SPC members should be consulted at an early stage and provided with all relevant background information. Draft policy proposals will be considered at SPC meetings and if agreed, will be brought to the full Council for consideration and ratification.
- The SPC may seek the attendance of other public authorities at SPC meetings to assist in developing policy.
- SPC meeting minutes should also be circulated to the full Council following approval at SPC meeting.
- SPC meetings should be conducted in a collaborative atmosphere that will allow views and opinions to be expressed.
- Provision is made for payment of expenses by the Council to any SPC Member who does not receive expenses from their own organisation in respect of attendance at SPC meetings.
- The activities of each SPC will be outlined in the Council's Annual Report.

## **MEDIA AND TRAINING**

Meetings of SPCs will generally be open to the media unless a committee decides otherwise.

Training will be provided for all SPC Members by Westmeath County Council. In the case of Sectoral Representatives, this training will be tailored towards the sector they represent and the work programme on their particular SPC.

## **SCHEME PROCESS**

Following consideration of this draft scheme for ***Westmeath County Council Corporate Policy Group and Strategic Policy Committees*** by the Council, it is proposed to consult with relevant stakeholders including:

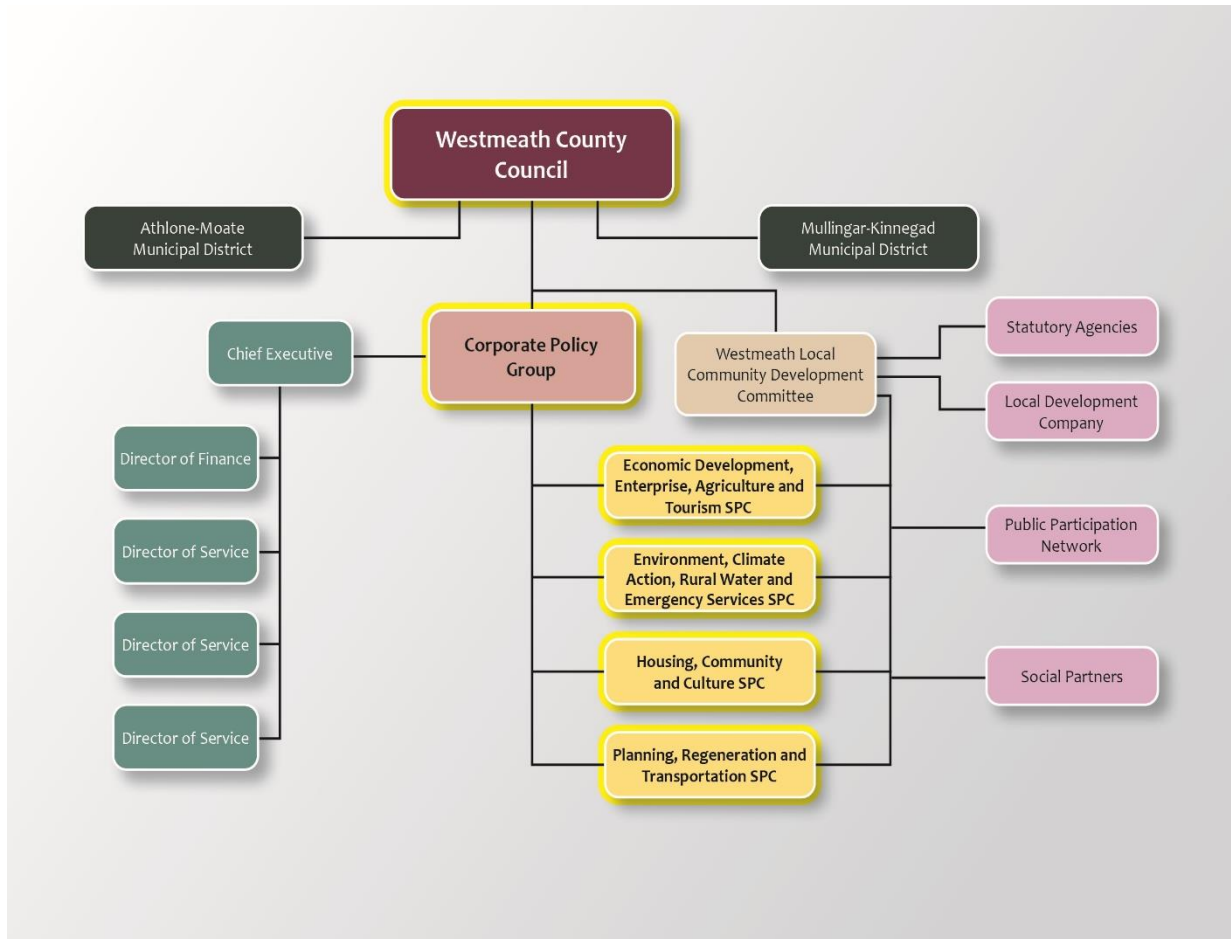
- a) The Public Participation Network (PPN)
- b) Sectoral interests
- c) The public through an advertisement in local media and on the Council's website.
- d) Copies of draft scheme will be made available in the Council's public offices.

Following consideration of submissions received on the draft scheme, amendments deemed appropriate will be made and the Council will then consider adoption of the revised scheme. On adoption of the scheme, the Council will then seek nominations for SPC Membership.

The CPG, in consultation with the Chief Executive, will continue to monitor the operation of the SPC system to ensure its efficient and effective operation during the life of the Council.

# APPENDIX 1

## Westmeath County Council ORGANISATION STRUCTURE



## APPENDIX 2

### SPC MEMBERSHIP

| Sector                                   | Strategic Policy Committee                                 |                                                                 |                                 |                                           | Total     |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------|
|                                          | Economic Development, Enterprise, Agriculture and Tourism. | Environment, Climate Action Rural Water and Emergency Services. | Housing, Community and Culture. | Planning, Regeneration and Transportation |           |
| Westmeath County Council Elected Members | 5                                                          | 5                                                               | 5                               | 5                                         | 20        |
| Agriculture / Farming                    | 1 No.                                                      | 1 No.                                                           |                                 |                                           | 2         |
| Development /Construction                | 1 No.                                                      |                                                                 |                                 | 1 No.                                     | 2         |
| Business / Commercial                    | 1 No.                                                      |                                                                 |                                 | 1 No.                                     | 2         |
| Trade Union                              |                                                            |                                                                 | 1 No.                           |                                           | 1         |
| PPN Community / Voluntary pillar         | 1 No.                                                      | 1 No.                                                           | 1 No.                           | 1 No.                                     | 4         |
| PPN Social Inclusion pillar              |                                                            | 1 No.                                                           | 2 No.                           |                                           | 3         |
| PPN Environment/ Conservation pillar     |                                                            | 1 No.                                                           |                                 | 1 No.                                     | 2         |
| <b>Total</b>                             | <b>9</b>                                                   | <b>9</b>                                                        | <b>9</b>                        | <b>9</b>                                  | <b>36</b> |