



**Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall**
Donegal County Council

**DRAFT SCHEME FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT &
OPERATION OF STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEES
2024-2029**

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1. Background

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.

As per Section 48(1) of the 2001 Act, local authorities are required to establish “strategic policy committees 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”.

Each local authority has established SPCs which bring together both elected members, and people actively working with social, economic, cultural and environmental bodies to develop and review policies related to council services.

The SPCs thus provide elected members with external views as they discharge their strategic role in the development of the local authority, including their policy development and oversight roles within the local authority. The SPC system provides them with a better focus and enhanced capacity for involvement in policy formulation, review and evaluation, with inbuilt assistance of relevant sectoral interests and the support of a Director of Services.

SPCs prepare the groundwork for policies which are then decided on by the local authority, including as appropriate at municipal district level. Accordingly, local sectoral interests, including the trade union, farming, environmental and community/voluntary sectors, along with the business community, constitute one third of the membership of SPCs.

While the exact remit of SPCs varies from local authority to local authority, depending on the individual SPC scheme most local authorities have established either four or five SPCs, reflecting the main local authority programmes such as housing, planning and environment.

This Draft Scheme details, inter alia, the proposed structure, membership, and the methodology for selection of participants to be used in the establishment of new SPCs.

2. Preparation of Draft Scheme

The Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage issued Revised Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Corporate Policy Group (CPG) and Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) in 2024.

The Corporate Policy Group (CPG) is responsible for assisting the Chief Executive drafting the SPC Scheme for consideration by the Council, and progression of the establishment process. The CPG comprises the Cathaoirleach, as Chair, together with the Chairs of each of the SPCs, and is supported by the Chief Executive, Directors of Service and other staff, as required.

3. Roles of CPG & SPCs and Local Community Development Committees

(a) Corporate Policy Group

The statutory basis for CPGs 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 CPG, like an SPC, is a committee of the council. Its task is to advise and assist the council, with full decision-making authority remaining with the council. The Cathaoirleach reports to the full council on the work of the CPG. In such context, it is a matter for each council, in co-operation with the Chief Executive, to determine the range of responsibilities and tasks of the CPG.

The CPG should:

- play a key role in preparing the budget.
- 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.
- 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.
- monitor the overall performance of a local authority, including in relation to matters of governance and oversight, though 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.
- deal with overall issues in relation to service delivery plans, customer service, value for money, etc., (individual SPCs would deal with such issues in their work insofar as their particular service remit was concerned).
- approve the work programmes of the SPCs and monitor their achievement.
- co-ordinate the work of the SPCs.
- request SPCs to consider particular policy issues; where appropriate; and
- provide feedback to the SPCs on council policy and views in areas relevant to the SPCs.

(b) Strategic Policy Committees

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. Therefore, if the SPC system operates satisfactorily, much of the preliminary and background work, discussion and recommendation should be completed at SPC level for final consideration and ratification by the council.

The success of the SPCs is crucially dependent on the active involvement of councillors, sectoral representatives, Chief Executives, directors and staff that are focused on the strategic role of SPCs.

The work of the SPC chair and Director of Services is of critical importance.

(c) Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs)

Donegal Local & Community Development Committee has been established for the purposes of developing, coordinating and implementing a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development. Donegal LCDC has brought together local authority members and officials, State agencies and people actively working with local development, community development, and economic, cultural and environmental organisations to implement a joined-up, cross-sectoral approach to local and community development programming. The primary function of the LCDC will continue to be the preparation of the community elements of a 6-year Local Economic and Community Plan and overseeing the implementation of the plan through co-ordinating, planning and overseeing local and community development funding.

Membership of the Local Community Development Committee (LCDCs) is drawn from four main sectors as follows: -

- Local Government
- State Agencies
- Local & Community Development Sector
- Social, Economic & Community Interests

4. Chairs of the SPCs

The SPC chairs have a pivotal role in ensuring the success of the SPCs. In that context, to facilitate the smooth and effective operation of the SPCs and the CPG, local authorities should ensure that 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.

SPC chairs are appointed by the full Council for a minimum period of three years and the overall spread of SPC chairs must reflect the elected representational spread on the full council. They should also reflect the gender make-up of the council.

It is also important that the SPC chairs appointed by the full Council should, as far as it is practical, be representative of each of the municipal districts in the local authority and, in local authorities without municipal districts, be representative of each of the area committees.

5. Term of Office of Committee Members

(a) Elected Members

Elected members will hold office for the lifetime of the Council. A member ceasing to be a councillor would automatically cease to be a member of the SPC. Each member of the Council is entitled to be on one SPC, but it is recommended that no member should be on more than two.

(b) Sectoral Representatives

It is desirable that sectoral nominees retain membership of the SPC for the life of the Council. It would be open to each nominating sector to de-select its nominee, if felt necessary, and to notify the Council accordingly, where upon the nominee would cease to be a member. In such cases, the relevant sector would nominate a new representative. Where a casual vacancy occurs, it would also be filled by the relevant sector.

Feedback from sectors suggests that allowing nominated substitutes would assist participation to a greater extent. While this is not strictly in conformity with the guidelines, it is recommended that it be implemented to ensure, as far as practicable, participation by all stakeholders.

It is recommended that attendance at meetings should be reviewed by the CPG. In that regard, the relevant Director of Service shall submit an attendance report for each SPC, annually. If it is found that some nominees have a poor attendance record, this fact should be brought to the attention of the sector that nominated them, with a suggestion that they consider making an alternative nomination.

6. Number and Configuration of SPCs

In light of the local authority's role across a range of public services delivered locally, SPCs should have a reasonably broad remit. While the remit will be anchored in the main local government services, it should not operate in a restrictive way but in the context of the wider local picture taking account of related public services and agencies and of local needs and of circumstances generally, e.g., an environment SPC should have regard for transport issues and vice versa.

In addition, each SPC is required to consider climate action and climate impacts as part of any and all policies that form part of its work programme. Again, deliberations in this regard should operate in a cross-cutting manner and in the broader public policy context; any interrelationships with other policy domains should be taken into account while considering policies.

The directorate structure currently in operation in Donegal is as follows:

- Community Development & Planning Services
- Economic Development, Information Systems & Emergency Services
- Finance
- Housing, Corporate & Cultural Services
- Roads & Transportation Services
- Water & Environment Services

Financial policy falls within the remit of the Corporate Policy Group and the Elected Council.

The Council decided at its first AGM held on 21st June 2024 to elect 6 SPC Chairs designate pending re-establishment of the new committees.

The following SPC configuration is proposed:

SPC 1 – Economic Development, Enterprise & Emergency Services

To be serviced by the Director of Economic Development, Information Systems and Emergency Services

SPC 2 – Roads & Transportation

To be serviced by the Director of Roads & Transportation Services

SPC 3 – Housing & Corporate

To be serviced by the Director of Corporate, Housing & Cultural Services

SPC 4 – Community, Social & Cultural

To be serviced by the Director of Community Development & Planning Services, with attendance from Cultural Services as required

SPC 5 – Climate Action & Environment

To be serviced by the Director of Water & Environment Services

SPC 6 – Planning

To be serviced by the Director of Community Development & Planning Services

7. Sectors to be Represented on SPCs

Having regard to the Guidelines on the Establishment and Operation of SPCs and the range of sectoral interests in the county, the following sectors will each be represented on at least two SPCs: -

(a) Agriculture / Farming

This sector will be represented arising from the implications of rural policy change at EU and national level and the spatial impact associated with this change.

(b) Environmental / Conservation

This sector will be represented due to the fact that local authorities are primary instruments for the implementation of EU and national policy in the environment, conservation, cultural sectors and climate action.

(c) Development / Construction

This sector will be represented due to the impact of physical planning policy on the sector and to the need to relate long-term infrastructural development, for which local authorities have major responsibility.

(d) Business / Commercial

This sectors representation would arise from the relevance of much of local authority activity to the sector and to the level of Local Government resources generated from that sector.

(e) Trade Union

This sector would be represented due to their longstanding contribution to the national policy process and their extensive representation at local level.

(f) Community / Voluntary / Social Inclusion

This sectors representation would be due to the need to recognise community involvement as key to the long-term development of projects within local communities in the county.

(g) Fishing / Aquaculture

This sectors representation is unique to the county and is critical to the economy, arising from the implications of EU and national policies.

8. Membership

It is proposed that each SPC will have a minimum total membership of 15, with one-third of membership drawn from sectoral interests. This will enable a range of opinions and perspectives to be represented from the elected members and from the sectoral groups.

In light of the above, the following membership is proposed:

- Economic, Development Enterprise and Emergency 21, 14 elected members and 7 sectoral representatives.
- The other 5 SPCs would each have a total membership of 15, 10 elected members and 5 sectoral representatives.

These would yield, in total, 96 positions, 64 for elected members and 32 for sectoral representatives.

9. Assignment of Sectoral Interest

The representation and assignment of sectors to particular committees takes account of the area of interest of the sector and the proposed changes in the configuration of the committees, dealt with earlier.

Assignment of sectoral interests to each SPC to be as follows:

Economic Development, Enterprise & Emergency

- Agriculture / Farming
- Environmental / Conservation
- Development / Construction
- Business / Commercial
- Trade Union
- Community / Voluntary / Social Inclusion
- Fishing / Aquaculture

Roads & Transportation

- Agriculture / Farming
- Development / Construction
- Business / Commercial
- Community / Voluntary / Social Inclusion
- Fishing / Aquaculture

Housing & Corporate

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

Community, Social & Cultural

- Environmental / Conservation
- Business / Commercial
- Trade Union
- Community / Voluntary / Social Inclusion
- Community / Voluntary / Social Inclusion

Climate Action & Environment

- Agriculture / Farming
- Environmental / Conservation
- Development / Construction
- Business / Commercial
- Fishing / Aquaculture

Planning

- Agriculture / Farming
- Environmental / Conservation
- Development / Construction
- Business / Commercial
- Community / Voluntary / Social Inclusion

The following would be the proposed make-up of the 6 Committees:

Strategic Policy Committees	County Councillor	Sectoral	Total
Economic Development Enterprise and Emergency Services	14	7	21
Roads & Transportation	10	5	15
Housing & Corporate	10	5	15
Community, Social & Cultural	10	5	15
Climate Action & Environment	10	5	15
Planning	10	5	15
Totals	64	32	96

With sectoral representation as follows:

Sector	Membership
Agriculture / Farming	5
Environmental / Conservation	4
Development / Construction	5
Business / Commercial	6
Trade Union	3
Community / Voluntary / Social Inclusion	6
Fishing / Aquaculture	3
Total	32

10. Selection of Sectoral Representatives

(a) Sectoral Views

The Guidelines recommend that, at every appropriate opportunity, steps be taken to ensure that the views of the sectors, as represented by the National Pillars of the partnership process, and other more local interests, be sought with a view to ensuring that the process be seen as inclusive, transparent and effective.

The following are among the factors to be considered in determining representation:

- The need to foster economic and social development generally.
- The need to ensure a proactive approach to having as many relevant sectors as possible across the SPC system.
- The priority concerns of each sector and the appropriateness of the SPCs to these concerns.
- The relationship between the number of SPCs and the range of interests that can be represented.
- The need for balance between divergent interests
- A commitment to the fostering of social inclusiveness and equality in line with the principles of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy
- A stated commitment to working towards gender balance and to encouraging as full as possible gender balance and representation from the sectors.

(b) Selections Criteria

The number of SPCs (6), their size and range of responsibilities, will, of necessity, limit the number and range of interests which can be accommodated on any SPC.

(c) The Nomination Process

Each sector will be invited to select its own nominee(s) via the PPN. The nomination of sectoral representatives is the sole responsibility of each particular sector.

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.

It is proposed that one month should be sufficient as a timeframe to enable the nomination process.

11. Circulation of Draft Scheme

Department Circular Letter LG 07/2014 of 29th May 2014 states:

"Local Authorities are required to engage in public consultation on the draft scheme. However, it is not envisaged that the same level of public consultation in the drafting of the scheme for the new SPCs as outlined in paragraph 5.5 of the revised 2014 guidelines will be needed in cases where the previous scheme is not being substantially altered. Local Authorities are free, however, to engage in this more intensive consultation process where they feel it is appropriate."

In this regard, it is proposed that the Council will circulate a copy of the Draft Scheme to the contact persons of the National Pillars of Partnerships, to the Community Forum and to the PPN, and through other local arrangement where no suitable forum exists. A copy of the Draft Scheme will also be available on the Council website <https://consult.donegal.ie> and a notice to that effect will be published in a number of local newspapers circulating in the County.

12. Operation of SPCs

To operate effectively the SPCs must:

- Adopt a multi-annual work programme linked to the local authority's Corporate Plan and updated regularly as necessary.
- Circulate meeting documentation to SPC members, ideally one week in advance and, additionally, circulate agendas and minutes to other councillors within the county.
- Adhere to the guidance of the CPG who decide the work programmes of the SPCs and recommend issues to be considered by the SPCs.

13. Action Plan / Reporting Mechanisms

(a) Work Programmes

In anticipation of the establishment of the new SPCs, the Chair of each SPC, together with the relevant Director, will prepare a draft multi-annual programme of work for their committee, and submit same to the CPG for consideration. These programmes of work will derive from, inter alia:

- The strategic objectives of the organisation to be set out in the Corporate Plan
- The short-term and intermediate policy implications of long-term strategies (e.g., County Development Plan)
- Policies issues arising from reviews of the implementation of work programmes, e.g., customer service standards, value for money, procurement procedures, annual operational programmes.
- The implications of new or anticipated legislation, EU Directives, Department circulars, etc.

These draft programmes should then be presented to the next meeting of the CPG, to ensure that the programmes are comprehensive and to identify those issues, transcending more than one SPC, which will require co-ordination by the CPG. When the draft work programmes are agreed by the CPG, they should be presented to the full Council. This will also ensure that all members are familiar with what each SPC will be doing. It should also be helpful to individual Council members

in determining their preferences for SPC membership. Furthermore, they will be useful in discussions with prospective SPC members from the nominated sectors.

When the committees have been established, they may wish to add additional items to the programme; however, such requests will have to be channelled through the CPG if they would materially alter the programme of work of the particular SPC or affect the programme of another committee.

(b) Setting the Agenda

The Chair and the relevant Director should agree the agenda for each SPC meeting in advance. The agreed work programme, together with any significant recent developments (e.g., changes in legislation, new funding programmes) will provide the framework for the agenda. In respect of every agreed item, the Director will prepare a discussion document for the committee, setting out the issues involved, their implications (including the financial implications where appropriate) for the County, and a range of policy options to be considered. This will help to set clear objectives for each committee meeting.

(c) Frequency of Meetings

It is proposed that each committee will meet four times per annum. An annual schedule of meetings will be agreed at the beginning of each calendar year. It is proposed that separate dates be identified for the quarterly meetings of each committee.

(d) Location & Time of Meetings

Meetings will normally be held at Corporate Headquarters in Lifford and will take place during normal working hours.

(e) Policy Recommendations

SPCs are committees of the Council, and the following procedures are proposed for the bringing of policy recommendations from the SPCs to the Council for consideration:

- Initial drafts of policy recommendations to be brought back to the CPG by the Chair and Director.
- The members of the CPG may require an opportunity to consult with party colleagues before deciding on the matter. In such cases, the proposal will be listed on the agenda for the next CPG meeting.
- Having considered the SPC's recommendations, the CPG shall forward same to Council, attaching its own recommendations/comments.
- The policy proposals to be presented to the Council by the SPC Chair, with support as required from the relevant Director.

(f) Keeping Stakeholders and Public Informed

Minutes of every SPC meeting, when adopted, will be made available to each member of the County Council. This will enable every elected representative to keep in touch with what is happening in each SPC, so that they can raise matters, if necessary, with colleagues on any SPC.

As SPC deliberations are public meetings, it is proposed to post the minutes of each meeting on the website, once they are confirmed as to accuracy. Publication of minutes should not be interpreted as evidence that policy recommendations therein have been adopted by the Council.

Any such recommendations will have to be listed on the agenda of a Council meeting and only when adopted will it become Council policy.

The media, and the public, have a right of access to SPC meetings. In recent years meetings have been held in a hybrid environment (in-person/online) and it is proposed that this would continue.

An SPC may resolve into *committee*, subject to compliance with the prescribed procedures, in order to adequately discuss sensitive issues. From time to time, it may also prove beneficial to hold informal briefings. This should be left at the discretion of the SPC Chairs for the present, but it can be reviewed by the CPG as required.

Regards

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Director of Service