

# STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEES

# S P C

AN OVERVIEW OF WHAT THEY MEAN FOR COMMUNITY

FOR THOSE PPN PEOPLE WHO HAVE JOINED OR ARE CONSIDERING JOINING THEIR LOCAL STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEES, THIS OVERVIEW WORKSHOP IS TO GIVE A BRIEF ON WHAT SPCS ARE, WHY THEY ARE IN PLACE AND HOW THEY CAN BE VEHICLES FOR CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITIES.



## WHY?

THE HISTORY AND THE REASON BEHIND WHY WE HAVE SPCS

## HOW?

THE METHODS BY WHICH SPCS WORK AND HOW THEY AFFECT POLICY AT A LOCAL LEVEL

# STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEES, THE WHAT, THE WHY AND THE HOW

Brought to The Northwest PPNs by  
CavanPPN Coordinator Daniel Downey

**VIA ZOOM OCT 1ST FROM  
7.30-8.30PM**

ZOOM LINK: [HTTPS://US02WEB.ZOOM.US/J/87985310822](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87985310822)

# Welcome to this SPC Informal Workshop

- Daniel Downey is the longest serving PPN Staff member in Ireland and has overseen the election and supports for over forty SPC representatives in over a decade. He is here to help try and grapple with the potential and idea of being a member of an SPC and how best to make it a fulfilling experience.
  - **7.30-7.40: History and Background of Strategic Policy Committees.**
    - **7.40-7.50: Why Do SPCs Exist, For Councils and For PPNs.**
    - **7.50-8.00: How Do SPCs Work, In Policy and In Practice.**
      - **8.00-8.10: Measuring Your Participation.**
  - **8.10-8.20: Hints & Tips On Maximizing Your SPC Experience.**
    - **8.20-8.30: Open Discussion & Questions and Answers.**

# Timeline of SPCs

Consistent reviews, appraisals & references:

**2004 Int of Publ Admin Survey of SPCs**

**2009 Dept Survey of SPCs**

**2012 Putting People First Recommendations**

**2014 Local Govt Act granting PPN Representation on SPCs**

**2024 Department & IPA Review of SPCs**

Better Local Governmtn, A Programme for Change: **'strengthening local democracy and widening participation'**

**1996**

**2001**

Establishment under the 2001 Local Government Act to **'consider matters connected with the formulation, development, monitoring and review of policy'**

**2004, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2024**

**2014-19-24**

The providing of Community sectoral interest representatives from the Public Participation Networks as outlined in The Local Government Act of 2014.

**'Each sector will select its own nominee(s) via the PPN, where appropriate.'**

-The IPA 2024 Review of SPCs

# Why Do SPCs Exist? For Councils

- • The SPCs assist the council in the formulation, development and review of policy
- • SPCs 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
- • A focus on the SPCs' policy-making and strategic role is fundamental to the SPC concept.

Source: DECLG, 2014

# Why Do SPCs Exist? For PPNs

- The SPCs assist the PPN in the voicing of community interests in Council policy.
- SPCs give an opportunity for PPN representatives to bring together various voices from within the county's community groups to bring to bear their solutions to common issues which a Council policy change might address. It is also a table whereby the PPN reps can be counted equally with the political and statutory members of the SPC.
- It gives an insight into the internal mechanisms, personalities and policies at the heart of Council decision making.

# How Do SPCs Work

## In Policy

- SPCs function by hosting regular meetings. At these proposed policies directing Council matters developed by the executive or political members are brought before a wider consultative body. These discuss the policy, give their insights into them and determine the worth of the policies from a wider perspective according to their representation.
- Members can raise points of discussion to direct the work of the SPC and query policy decisions and positions that determine the sections of the council under the remit of that SPC.

## In Practice

- SPCs receive policies already well developed and signed off on from a variety of internal stakeholders. In practice, the power to reject or implement major alterations to policy is hampered by this.
- Most agenda points are presented as fixed by the organisers of the meeting with very little notice given to add agenda points from anyone except the organisers (usually the chair and executive of the Council). This leads often to a passive and 'rubber stamping' SPC.

**A POLICY ON X IS  
REQUIRED**

**Council Staff Research &  
Develop the Policy**

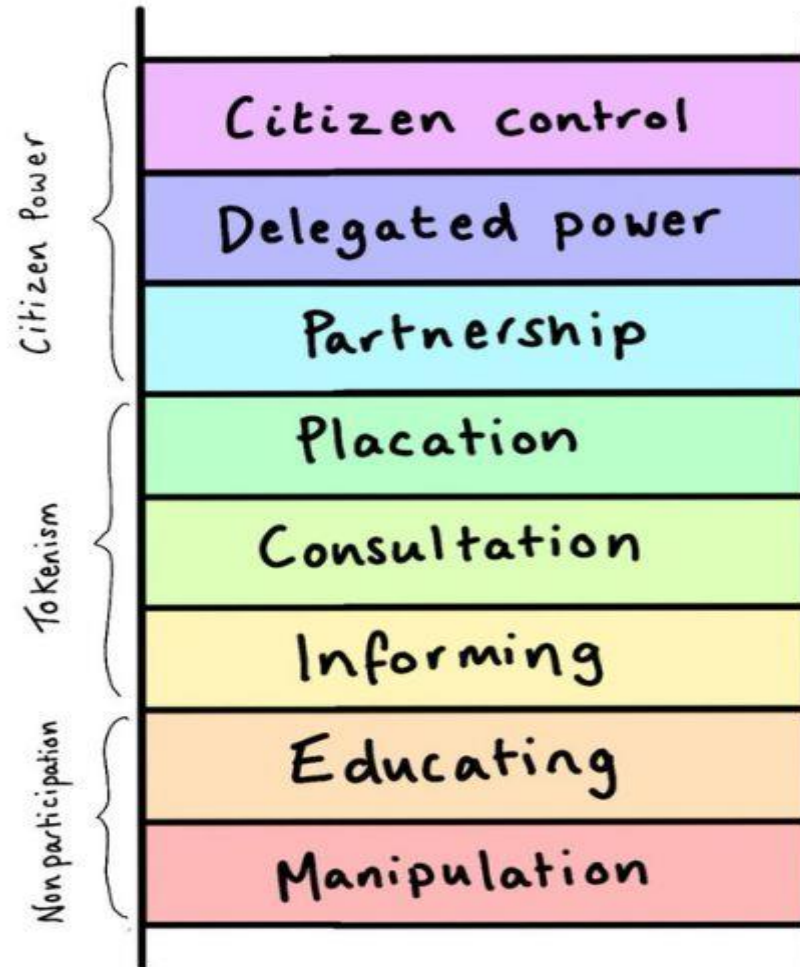
**The Necessary Consults &  
Sign-Offs are made**

**Policy X is Brought Before the  
relevant SPC**

# How Participative Are SPCs

The Arnstein Ladder of participation is worth using to analyse the inclusion of alternative voices around the SPC table. In most cases this is somewhere around Informing, Consultation or Placation but some strategies can boost you up that ladder.

## Ladder of Participation (Arnstein, 1969)



Stakeholders have the idea and **set up the project**

Goal created by a facilitator but **resources and responsibility given to citizens**

Stakeholders have **direct involvement** in decision making

Stakeholders **shape ideas**, but final decision sits with facilitators

Stakeholder **views are sought** but decisions made by facilitators

Stakeholders are **informed on decisions** but no opportunity to contribute

Assumption that the stakeholders are **passive recipients**

The illusion of participation when **actually power is denied**

# Some Ways To Increase Input & Inclusion

- **Caucus!** If you have another community rep on the SPC with you, meet for tea/coffee before and after meetings. If not, reach to another PPN rep on another SPC or a person on your SPC with some commonalities to see how you can work together.
- **YOUR Agenda** The agenda belongs to the members, not the Council or the Chair or anyone else. At the end of each meeting, you feel free to have it minutes under AOB that you want X on the next agenda. If it does not appear, raise it under Minutes & Matters Arising that it was decided at the last meeting to include it!
- **Understand:** Read the Guidelines (ask for them) and demand an Induction. Read the PPN handbook too, knowing you speak for hundreds of groups helps confidence!
- **Look Wider!** It's worth asking your PPN worker to put you in touch with other county's SPC reps on your SPC to see how they've gotten work done. SPCs can't argue against the precedent of work being done by another county's SPC on the same topic.
- **Build Personal Bridges** Actually ask the staff who work on that SPC can you meet them. If you show an interest and are genuine about engaging they will respond in turn. There might be divisions of diverse backgrounds but what brings us together is a willingness and hope to make our counties better places to be.
- **Calendar:** At the end of each year demand meeting dates for the next years SPCs be outlined and adopted at the 1<sup>st</sup> SPC meeting of the year. Everyone will want this.



THANK YOU  
& I WISH YOU THE VERY BEST  
IN YOUR CANDIDACY  
AND/OR  
SERVICE TO OUR COMMUNITIES  
AS THEIR REPRESENTATIVES