

5 The Representatives



Local Authorities and other local bodies have a range of Committees and Boards to support them to develop policy by involving external expertise. This expertise can be drawn from sectoral interests such as employers, farmers, trades unions and the community. **Community representation – that of the Community and Voluntary, Social Inclusion and Environmental sectors - is a core function of the PPN. Other groups** who have representation through other pillars of social partnership e.g. trade unions, farming and business organisations, cannot seek representation through the PPN. The Local Authority must use the PPN to appoint Community Representatives to these Boards and Committees and to ensure that they are listened to.

PPN Representatives must then provide feedback to the PPN and their Linkage Group, within the limits of confidentiality, about what was discussed at their meetings and the outcomes of these discussions. **It is the responsibility of the PPN Representatives to provide this feedback.**

Who can be a Representative

PPN Representatives perform an important function on behalf of PPNs. They are elected by Member Groups in their College / area to get involved in, and contribute to, Local Authority Boards or Committees on behalf of the PPN. In doing this, they represent the PPN as a whole, their own Municipal District / area, their College and their group.

The regulations concerning Local Authority staff serving as elected representatives in local, national and European government will also apply to PPN representation. Local Authority staff above the prescribed grade are not eligible to represent the PPN on Local Authority Boards and Committees even where they are involved with a Member Group. Following the guidance provided in Departmental Circular CVSP 01/2014, the following criteria will apply in making a decision on who to nominate:

- The track record of the nominee in working on the issue that is the focus for the representative forum.
- The ability of the nominee to make an effective contribution.
- The participation of people experiencing the problem/issue to be addressed at the representative forum.
- Whether the problem/issue to be addressed at the forum is a 'core issue' for the PPN member.
- As far as possible ensuring fair distribution of positions across geographical areas.
- As far as possible ensuring gender balance.
- A commitment from the person(s) to participate fully with the Linkage Group, including reporting back.

Role, Rights and Responsibilities of the Representative

A Representative is elected for a fixed term to represent the issues of Member Groups on a particular Board or Committee. Details of the exact term of office should be provided with the information requesting nominations for the role. Some of these Boards or Committees are policy-driven, rather than operational bodies, while others are operational only. Elections to these Boards and Committees take place according to procedures developed by the Secretariat and approved by the Plenary. An example of this process is set out later in this Section.

The role of PPN Representative is an active and participative one which requires commitment and time. Representatives are required to represent the views of their Linkage / Thematic Group (where Thematic Groups are used to nominate and elect Representatives) as a whole, and not their own personal views, nor those of their Municipal District, Sector or Nominating Body. Before a potential Representative decides that they want to be nominated, they should read their PPN's Representative Charter in full and ask their PPN Resource Worker if they have any questions or need anything clarified. A sample Representatives Charter is set out in Appendix 3 of this Handbook.

Representatives are required to communicate regularly with their Linkage / Thematic Groups to make sure that they are bringing agreed and relevant issues to the Boards and Committees on which they sit. They are also required to report back regularly to Linkage / Thematic Groups using the standard PPN reporting template. A sample Reporting Template is set out in Appendix 4.

Role of the Representative

The role of the Representative is a rewarding one. It is also a commitment of time and energy to make sure that it is carried out fully. To do this, the Representative must:

- Attend and participate fully in meetings of the Linkage / Thematic Group and Board or Committee, including any subgroups to which they may be appointed.
- Bring forward the issues of the Linkage Group to the Board or Committee for their consideration, including putting items on the agenda. They are not there just to represent their own group or opinion.
- Work collaboratively with the Linkage / Thematic Group to identify issues, research, policy proposals etc. of interest or concern to the Group.
- Communicate regularly (at least as often as meetings are held) with the Linkage / Thematic Group about
 - Dates of Board or Committee meetings
 - Agendas for Board or Committee meetings
 - Reports from Board or Committee meetings
 - Items which require their input and / or are of interest to the Linkage / Thematic Group

- Network and work strategically with other Board or Committee members for the benefit of the Linkage / Thematic Group and of the PPN, including being able to compromise while maintaining the core agreed objective of the Linkage / Thematic Group.

Rights of the Representative

Given the commitment asked of the Representative, they of course should be entitled to expect certain rights. These rights are to:

- Have active engagement from the Linkage / Thematic Group, including timely responses to issues raised.
- Be heard and respected as a full and equal member at both the Linkage / Thematic Group and the Board or Committee, with an appreciation that they are a volunteer.
- Be supported by both Linkage / Thematic Group and Board or Committee members who respect the PPN and its contribution.
- In accordance with best practice, have access to an Agreed Outcome Statement or minute from meetings which can be circulated as soon as possible afterwards.
- Receive relevant training to allow them to feel confident to participate on the Board or Committee.
- Receive expenses from the Local Authority for attending Board or Committee meetings including any subgroups and relevant training provided by the Local Authority.
- In accordance with best practice have the Local Authority try to hold at least some meetings at a time and location which facilitates them.
- Receive an induction pack for the Board or Committee (and provided by the Board or Committee) on taking up appointment to include
 - Terms of reference
 - Standing orders /procedures
 - Meeting schedules, locations and times, agenda and documents to be read in advance (at least two weeks in advance, and more if possible) including
 - Contact details for all Board or Committee members (subject to GDPR)
 - Access to technical support where required
- Have meetings conducted in a way that facilitates participation, open discussion and transparent decision making.

Responsibilities of the Representative

The Representative also has responsibilities to the PPN and the Linkage / Thematic Group. These include to:

- Organise Linkage / Thematic Group meetings and effective communications with Linkage Group members.
- Be able to use basic electronic communications effectively (i.e. email and internet browsing) or other suitable alternative.
- Prepare thoroughly for, attend and participate actively in Linkage Group and Board or Committee meetings solely on behalf of the PPN, leaving any personal, business or political interests aside.
- Work openly and collaboratively with all Linkage / Thematic Group members to identify issues, research, policy proposals etc., while respecting the diversity of views expressed.
- Put forward opinions / views of Linkage / Thematic Group to the Board or Committee and feedback clearly (non-jargon) to the Linkage / Thematic Group.
- Attend relevant training or networking events organised by the PPN or the Committee.
- Be open and honest in dealings with all stakeholders.
- Build positive relationships with other Board / Committee members for the benefit of the PPN.
- Portray the PPN and the Linkage / Thematic Group in a positive and constructive way.

Time Commitment

Representing the views of the PPN on a Board or Committee is one of the most rewarding aspects of joining a PPN, but it does come with a time commitment. This commitment will vary depending on the Board or Committee. The information sent out with the nomination forms for each Board or Committee should provide an approximate time commitment based on the previous experience of the PPN. This can only ever be approximate as circumstances may mean that fewer or greater number of meetings will be required.

Nominations Process

Depending on the Board or Committee, there may be differences in the process for nominating Representatives across PPNs. The following is a *sample nominations process*:

- The PPN will make a call for nominations from the Colleges/Linkage / Thematic Groups / Member Groups, giving at least 10 days' notice before the closing date for nominations. The information sent out with the nomination form will include an overview of the work of the Board or Committee concerned and an approximate time commitment for Representatives.
- Nominating organisations must be full registered members of the PPN, whose registration has not lapsed. Member Groups whose membership has lapsed should register within the notification period. It will be a matter for the PPN to decide if that Member Group can nominate.
- The Member Group must complete the Nomination Form (see Appendix 5 for sample). Only fully completed and signed Nomination Forms will be accepted by the PPN.
- Late nominations will not be accepted.
- The nominee must confirm that they understand the role of the Representative, will follow the Constitution of the PPN and the Representatives Charter and will act at all times to further the objectives of the PPN.
- Following the closing date for nominations, all nominations are reviewed and, if everything is in order, accepted by the PPN Secretariat.
 - If more valid nominations are received than seats available, an election will take place (see sample Elections Process in this Section of the Handbook).
 - If the same number of valid nominations as available seats is received, the nominee(s) will be deemed elected.
 - If less valid nominations than seats are received, the PPN may look for an interim Representative from their membership to make sure that the PPN is represented on the Board or Committee concerned. This appointment would then be sent for approval by the Plenary.
- An individual may only represent the PPN on one Board or Committee (with the exception of Secretariat members, who are permitted to hold positions on both the Secretariat of the PPN and one other Board or Committee following the usual nominations and elections process).
- Where an individual has been nominated for, and elected to, more than one seat, they must choose their preferred Board or Committee. The seat on the Board or Committee not chosen will then be filled by the nominee with the next highest number of votes (if applicable) or re-advertised for election by the PPN.
- Where an individual is currently a Representative on a Board or Committee and is then nominated for and elected to another seat, they must choose their preferred Board or Committee.

- Where they prefer to continue in their current Representative role, the seat on the Board or Committee not chosen will then be filled by the nominee with the next highest number of votes (if applicable) or re-advertised for election by the PPN.
- Where they want to take up the role on the new Board or Committee, they must resign from their current Representative role. The vacancy on that Board or Committee will then be advertised and filled by the PPN in the usual way.
- Only in exceptional circumstances, and at the discretion of the Plenary, and on a temporary or interim basis, would an individual be allowed to sit on more than one Board or Committee.
- Representatives are nominated by Member Groups following an open and transparent nominations process. If the original nominating body no longer exists, or the Representative is no longer associated with that nominating body, the Representative will be deemed to have stepped down from the role and an alternate will be selected following another nominations process.



Elections Process

Where elections are required, PPNs may vary their processes to suit the needs of their Member Groups and the timeframes involved. The following is a *sample election process*. **The term “Member Groups” in this section refers to full Member Groups only. Associate Member Groups cannot participate in elections:**

- Elections will be free and accessible to all eligible Member Groups, in so far as is reasonably possible. It may, in some cases, be necessary to restrict elections, for example, to members of a particular College. Where restrictions are necessary, these should be transparent, with a clearly stated reason.
- Elections may be by email, online forms, post (with a FREEPOST return or stamped, addressed envelope) or other accessible means.
- All election materials will be sent by the PPN to the main contact address provided by each Member Group on registration / re-registration. It is the responsibility of Member Groups to ensure that their contact details are accurate and up to date.
- Election materials may vary between PPNs, however as a minimum should include:
 - An overview explaining what the election is for, who has been nominated (including their Member Group and College membership), and full details on how votes are to be returned and the date for return of votes.
 - A brief CV of each nominee, relevant to the election in progress (it is not intended that nominees will provide full career CVs).
 - Where applicable (e.g. for email and postal voting) ballot papers may also be provided setting out the maximum number of votes available for each ballot and how the vote should be cast (e.g. X, numerical preference etc.).
 - Where applicable, a FREEPOST or stamped, addressed envelope for the return of ballot papers.
 - At the discretion of the Secretariat, if approved by the Plenary, a list of eligible voting Member Groups per College or Linkage / Thematic Group may also be included, where voting is restricted. Eligible Member Groups are those full Member Groups (not Associate Members) who are currently registered with the PPN and whose membership has not lapsed.
 - If there is a tie, lots will be drawn and the first name pulled out will be deemed to be elected.
- A minimum of 10 days will be permitted for the return of ballot papers, unless circumstances require that voting is cast within a shorter timeframe and the Secretariat have made all reasonable effort to make sure that voting is accessible to all Member Groups.
- Where hard copy ballot papers are used, these will be stored, unopened, in a locked box until the day and time of the count, as stated on the ballot information sheet.
- The count is conducted by PPN Secretariat with candidates invited to attend and observe.

- Results are recorded in order of the highest number of votes received and a panel formed from unsuccessful candidates.
- If the elected candidate needs to step down during the term, or choose not to take up the position, the next person on the panel will take the position. All members of the panel will remain in place for one year or until the next membership re-registration date, whichever happens first.



PPN Representatives and Government Office

As well as the criteria for selection of a Representative, set out earlier in this Section, the following requirements must be met:



- Elected representatives of Local Authorities cannot be nominated through this process.
- If anyone nominated through this process then decides to enter electoral politics he/she must **immediately** resign their PPN Representative role and the relevant nominating PPN unit (Electoral College / Linkage Group) will choose a replacement.
- A person who has been an elected representative of any level of Government (local, national or European) should not be chosen to represent PPN in any representative role for one year after completing their term of office.
- Employees/professionals, where there is a conflict of interest, cannot be nominated.
- All PPN representatives must meet the criteria laid down by the unit (College / Linkage Group) that nominates them to their representative role.

Election to Government office



In order to preserve the independence of the PPN, current PPN Representatives cannot stand for election to any Government office, local, national or European, while remaining a Representative of the PPN. Once a Representative decides to stand for election to Government office, they must resign their position **immediately** before putting their name forward for nomination.

- If a Representative is unsuccessful in their bid to be nominated for election to Government office, they must wait at least 12 months after the date on which they were advised that their bid for nomination was unsuccessful before seeking election as a PPN Representative.
- Should the Representative be nominated for election, but be unsuccessful in their election, they must wait at least 12 months after the date of the election before seeking election to any PPN Representative role.
- Should the Representative have been successfully elected, they must wait at least 12 months from the date their term of office expires before seeking election to a PPN Representative role.

Induction Training and Ongoing Support

The PPN will provide induction training to all newly appointed Representatives. Representatives who are not newly appointed but who would like to take a “refresher” course can also attend this training, subject to numbers, with preference given to those who are newly elected. If possible, training should also be made available to Local Authority officials and councillors so as to deepen their understanding of PPNs.

As a minimum, this training should cover:

- The role of the PPN on Boards and Committees
- The Role, Rights and Responsibilities of the Representative
- The Representatives' Charter
- Using the Representatives' Reporting Template

The PPN may also work together with the Local Authority to provide training specifically relating to the Board or Committee on which the Representative will sit.

The PPN will try to provide this induction training as soon as possible after the appointment of the Representative. Except in exceptional circumstances as approved by the Secretariat for ratification by the Plenary, the Representative must make sure that they attend induction training in advance of attending any meetings of the Board or Committee to which they have been appointed.



The PPN also hosts and makes use of various training sessions that may be relevant to the Representatives throughout the year as part of its Workplan. Representatives must try to attend training of relevance to them and their role on their Board or Committee.

Reporting

Reporting back to the Linkage / Thematic Group and the PPN is a mandatory requirement of PPN Representatives. A report is required from every meeting attended by the Representative in their capacity as a PPN Representative.



Reports should be received no later than two weeks following the meeting / engagement and should be in the required format (see sample Representatives Report Form in Appendix 4). The Resource Worker should also receive a copy of the completed Representatives Report for the PPN records.

If the Representative fails to attend three consecutive meetings, or to provide Reports in good time, and in the opinion of the PPN Secretariat, without good reason, they may be asked to step down from the role. The Representative may appeal this decision in line with the PPN Complaints Procedure (see Appendix 2) within 10 days.

If the appeal is unsuccessful, or no appeal has been made, the PPN will select an alternative Representative either from a panel, should one be established, or otherwise following this Section of the Handbook.

Travel and Expenses



The Travel and Expenses policy of the individual Local Authority will govern the payment of travel and expenses for attendance at a Local Authority Board or Committee meeting. All travel and expenses payments will be made in accordance with public sector norms and apply only to travel within the county for meetings or outside the county in exceptional circumstances such as training, attending the PPN conference or Secretariat Network meetings.





**An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail**
Department of Rural and
Community Development

